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BEADLE'S

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# DIME NOVELS



## BUCKSKIN BILL.

BEADLE AND COMPANY, 98 WILLIAM STREET NEW YORK.

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**"A QUEER YARN."**

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**Beadle's Dime Novels, No. 207,**

**TO ISSUE SATURDAY, JULY 2d,**

May well be termed a "queer yarn." It is

# **THE BUFFALO TRAPPER.**

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**BY CHAS E. LASALLE,**

AUTHOR OF "BURT BUNKER, THE TRAPPER," ETC.

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98 William Street, New York.



BUCKSKIN BILL,



ROBERT AND COMPANY, PUBLISHERS

25 N. BROAD STREET.







# BUCKSKIN BILL;

OR,

THE WHITE DEMON OF THE WOODS.

(303.572)

BY GUY GREENWOOD,

AUTHOR OF "PHANTOM FOE; OR, THE MAID OF MONTMORENCI."

NEW YORK:

BEADLE AND COMPANY, PUBLISHERS,

98 WILLIAM STREET.



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Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1870, by  
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Southern District of New York.

(No. 206.)

BY GUY CLARK WOOD.

Author of "The White Demon of the Woods" and "The White Demon of the Woods."

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# BUCKSKIN BILL.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE BUCKSKIN GUIDE.

A BREAK in the thick growth of underbrush along the banks of a Western river, revealed a canoe floating silently upon its bosom, and a single man sitting upright, with his eyes flashing over the broad expanse of level country, which lay before him. In the distance were the bare ridges of the mountains, blue against the sky, and on the other side the limitless prairie, stretching outward as far as the eye could reach. The man in the canoe was not looking at the scenery, but at three riders seen upon the prairie, perhaps a mile distant, who were stationary at the foot of a low hill, looking across the country in the other direction. They were Indians, mounted upon the fleet steed of the plains, the mustang; but though too distant to make out their features, the man in the canoe was too good a judge of Indian habits and costumes not to know that they were part of a band of those pirates of the prairie, the Black-feet.

The man who sat in the canoe was of middle size, with a muscular frame, and a face bronzed by exposure to the sun and wind. Though a rough, rude forester, he had a frank, manly look about him, calculated to win friends. His rifle, the never-failing companion of border-men, lay in the bow of the canoe, ready for use, and evidently was a weapon which had seen service on many a field. The man wore a soiled buckskin hunting-shirt, and fringed leggins, with a beaver-skin cap, rudely made, and moccasins. Besides the rifle he carried a heavy hunting-knife of tried temper, and a pair of pistols, though the trapper set but little "store," by these weapons. The Indians remained in the same position at the foot of the hill, looking, at that distance, like statues carved in bronze. Clinging to a branch of a bush to keep himself from floating down the stream, the buckskin man sat quietly in the canoe,



with his eyes upon those inveterate foes of the trapper, the Blackfeet. "Cuss 'em," said the buckskin man, parenthetically, "the'r arter skulps!"

"Arter skulps" the Blackfeet certainly were, and the white man knew what party they were watching, and with the chivalrous feeling which is an innate principle in these rude border-men, he determined to do what he could to assist the menaced party of whites. He knew by the manner of the Blackfeet that they were simply on a scout, and that others of their band were lurking in the vicinity for the coming of evening before they made a dash. Indians rarely assail a white party in open day. It is either at nightfall, when they are corraling their horses or eating supper, or else just before break of day, that the assault is made. The watcher on the river remained quiet for a while, until the Indians turned their horses' heads, and began to ride slowly back toward the water-course.

"Back out!" said he, letting go his hold upon the bushes. "Them's the idee. I wonder what'n thunder brings em back?"

As the light canoe dropped downward under the pressure of the current, he saw what it was that drew the party back. A man was riding away from the river-bank at a lazy gallop. He evidently saw nothing of the red-skins, who were approaching him hidden by a roll in the prairie, their unshod horses making no noise upon the soft grass of the plain.

"This won't do for me," muttered the buckskin scout. "I ain't goin' to let a feller human git his ha'r raised without doin' a thing. Let see what my tulip says to it."

He pushed the canoe ashore, and ran up the bank hastily, rifle in hand, just as the long spears of the Blackfeet showed above the roll of the prairie, and they set forward at a hard gallop. The horseman now saw them for the first time, and throwing his hand behind him, he showed one of those weapons so dreaded by people of low civilization, the revolver, which he held ready in his hand, and looked at the coming Indians. Something in the attitude of the man warned the Indians that at least they had no coward to deal with, but a man of cool, resolute temper, not likely to flinch at the near prospect of danger. He checked his horse and stood facing them, quietly awaiting their approach. This attitude in one whom they had expected to ride down without trouble, was more



than the Blackfeet had counted on, and they halted irresolutely and jabbered to one another.

"Fouled a snag, by gravy!" the scout ejaculated. "He's a cool 'un, that chap, and a man arter my own heart. I'll wait; he ain't a prary man or he wouldn't ride in that way when he knowed Injun signs. They'll sarcumvent him ef he don't take keer."

The Indians were grouped together upon the plain, perhaps a hundred yards from the solitary horseman. All at once they appeared to come to a conclusion, for they separated with wild yells, and came at their game from three different directions, with their long spears ready. The man did not move, nor even raise his hand from his side until they came within easy range of the pistol, when the watchful scout saw him gather up his bridle-rein with his left hand, and by a skillful wheel which none but a good horseman could accomplish, bring two of the savages within range.

Crack, crack. Two riderless horses were seen bounding over the plain, while the third Indian, in desperation, wheeled and ran. Twice the horseman raised his pistol, but the Indian was out of sight behind the body of the horse, showing nothing except one foot and hand. The course of the Indian took him directly toward the river, and the spot where the buckskin scout stood half hidden by the bushes. In his anxiety to escape, the Indian did not see the new enemy until he sprung up suddenly, and laying one hand upon the bridle of the flying mustang, dealt the Indian a terrific blow upon the head with the other hand. The rascal's foot slipped from the stirrup, his hand released its hold, and he dropped senseless to the plain, the blood welling from a cut in his temple dealt by the iron hand of the scout. Without paying any attention to him, his assailant bounded into the saddle, and shouted to the other horseman:

"Come on yer, darn you! Thar's a grist of Blackfeet whar these 'uns come from, and we've got ter ride to the tune of the devil take the hindmost."

The man he had met showed by his prompt action that he was quick to understand danger when it came. Without asking a single question he joined the buckskin guide, and turning their horses' heads, they rode down the river at a breakneck



pace, hardly looking behind them. They had not ridden half a mile when they became conscious that they were closely pursued, and looking back, they saw a clump of Blackfoot spears just rising above the last roll of the prairie, a quarter of a mile away. These soon rose above the ridge, and revealed a band of more than thirty, in their picturesque attire, riding those fleet-footed and tireless animals, which are to be found only upon the prairie. Upon the right hand, riding hard, they saw another and smaller band laboring to get ahead of their foes, and force them toward the river. The buckskin guide looked at his companion with a grim smile, and set his teeth hard.

"That means fight," said the stranger, quietly. "Let us make for the foot-hills. Once there we can bid these knaves defiance."

"What mout yer name be, stranger?" said the scout, never ceasing his headlong course.

"I am called Clinton Aubrey, and I command an expedition now on its way to the Oregon river. What do you call yourself?"

"Them that knows me well call me Buckskin Bill," replied the other. "I'm a free trapper and guide, I be. Them red niggers want to cut us off from the prairie, an' drive us into the river, durn the'r hides. What d'ye think? Would we dar' to go through that little party on the right?"

"Have you got a revolver?" said Clinton Aubrey.

"No, I ain't; wish I had, but I ain't likely to git one, wuss luck."

"Try this one," said Aubrey, taking another from his right-hand holster. "Now do you think we can go through them?"

"You bet," was the short reply. "Ride easy, now. Edge a little away from the river. Them niggers ain't got no rifles, they ain't, an' they don't know that we've got repeaters, nuther. Now listen to me. Don't you *kill* the fust one you shoot at. Break his leg or his collar-bone. One wounded man is wuss than a dozen dead ones. 'Cause he yells an pulls up the grass. But whatever ye do, keep them durned spears off yer body, 'cause ef they git into you they'll make you feel uncomfortable; now mind, I tell you!"



The two had eased up their pace somewhat, though still riding at a sufficient speed to keep them ahead of the Indians in the rear. Those on the flank, seeing the distance lessening, began to close in more and more, and when within half a mile of the hills which the flying men proposed to make a haven of safety, scarcely a hundred yards separated them. They were now near enough to mark the grotesque costumes of the savages, and saw that they were all stalwart and ferocious-looking warriors, evidently the pick of the Black-foot tribe.

"Let me take that chap with the horns on the back of his head, and you pick the man in the *sombrero*, with the eagle-feathers sticking up. Knock 'em over an' then ride slap through 'em, giving it to 'em right and left."

When scarcely twenty yards separated them the yells of the Indians became deafening, and they pushed their wild steeds to the utmost, whirling their spears in the air, and beating upon their shields of buffalo-hide. Buckskin Bill gave the word, and the two whirled their horses suddenly and threw themselves upon the flank of the astonished warriors. The hero of the *sombrero* went down, yelling like a demon, shot through the lower part of the neck by Buckskin Bill, while he of the horns added a tuneful chorus to the concerted pieces sounded by his friends, for Clinton Aubrey was a good marksman, and shattered his shoulder by a well-directed shot. Then they burst into the midst of the savage band and sent a shower of bullets right and left, scattering their adversaries like chaff. The Blackfeet had heard stories of the death-dealing weapon which they now met for the first time, but had thought the tale merely an invention on the part of the trappers, to frighten them from assailing their straggling men. So paralyzed were they by the leaden shower that they made no attempt at resistance, but each used his best means of getting out of this dangerous vicinity, and the two thundered on toward the hills, leaving the discomfited band to foot up the profit and loss of the assault and find a heavy balance on the side of the revolvers.

But, though they had broken through the ranks of the enemy, they were not yet safe, for another and larger party were following close in the rear, rendered doubly ferocious by



the loss they had so recently suffered at the hands of the white men.

Though closely followed, the two men gained the pass, and darting up, found themselves among the foot-hills which they sought as a refuge. Knowing nothing of the country, Clinton Aubrey gave himself up to the guidance of Buckskin Bill, and followed him up the pass without a word. At last they rode through a part of the cañon a hundred feet above the level plain, so narrow that they could only ride singly. Once through the opening, they halted and loaded their revolvers.

"They won't come at us hyar easy," said Buckskin Bill, "'cause ye see only one of the durned critters kin come at a time, an' like ez not we'd make it lively fur him afore he got back. No sircle! Ef they've got a chief with 'em who understands white ways, you'll see him up yer with a flag. They know these hills, an' how easy two men c'u'd keep this pass ag'in' a hundred."

"Can't they come upon us from above, and fire down the rocks?" said Aubrey.

"Kain't git thar," said Buckskin Bill, with a chuckle. "Thar's the river on one side, an' on the other thar's a cañon a hundred feet wide. You hold stiddy while I go out an' take a look at 'em."

"Don't show yourself, my friend. You have already endangered yourself on my account."

"You shet up! Ain't one white human *got* to stand by another white human, *say*? Now don't you git me mad, *talkin'*. You stay yer while I go and scout."

He stole away on foot, and was gone about ten minutes. When he came back he was laughing heartily. When he had showed himself at the mouth of the pass, revolver in hand, the Indians, who were approaching it, halted with one accord, not caring to come too near the weapon he held. The chief was now coming to have a parley.

"I reckon we'd better rife down whar we kin see the red heathen," said Bill. "They might git up some deviltry ef we don't watch 'em clust."

They mounted again, and rode down the pass until they met the chief, who rode toward them with a piece of white buckskin flapping from the head of his patee. He was a



stalwart, handsomely-framed man, of a saturnine expression, painted in fantastic colors. He wore the fringed leggins common among the trappers, and rode with a high Mexican saddle, and the long spurs these cruel horsemen use. A shirt of fringed calico reached to the knee, and over it was thrown the heavy blanket, which a life in this region makes so necessary. His head was covered by a Fez cap, obtained no one knows how, in which a single eagle plume was thrust with jaunty grace.

This was the brave who rode up to the two white men, and with an effrontery only to be found in an Indian, extended his hand with the cordial greeting, in broken English: "How do?"

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE WHITE DEMON'S VICTIM.

BUCKSKIN BILL, though tempted to shoot the villain through the head, received the extended hand. He knew that the man before him was one of the most pitiless of these border-pirates, and had rolled up a fearful account of blood and crime. It was no other than the notorious Blackbird, a man whose whole life had been steeped in crimes of the blackest die; yet he approached the white men with the cool hardness of a more "civilized" rogue.

"Now look yer, Blackbird, what ar' you tryin' to do?" said Bill.

"The Blackfeet are very sad," said Blackbird, pathetically. "Their tears drop like rain, when they think how great a mistake their white brothers have made. See how great an evil a rash man can do! My white brother yonder was alone on the prairie. Three of my braves saw him, and ran to ask him if they could do him any good. When he took the little gun which shoots many times, and wounded them sore. It was a cruel thing to do, when they loved him so much."

"That's too *thin*, you know," said Bill. "Do friends usually come at a man with their spears leveled, yelling like painted devils?"



"They are playful," said Blackbird. "They said to themselves, it will make our white brother smile, when he sees the young braves shake their spears. But he, too cruel, shot them with the little gun. The hearts of the Blackfeet are very sore."

"Some of their heads ar' sore too," said Bill, upon whom the pathetic voice of Blackbird had very little effect. "Don't skulk now; be a man. I would, if I was you. What do you want?"

"My brothers must give up the little guns which shoot many times. The Blackfeet wish to see them."

"Would you like to look at one?" said Clinton, coming forward with the pistol in his hand. The Indian nodded, and watched furtively while he filled the single empty chamber, took out the old cap and recapped the weapon. The eyes of Blackbird glistened. To become possessed of such a weapon as that, he would have risked almost any thing.

"Would my brother show us how to use it?" said he.

"He did show you awhile back," said Buckskin Bill. "'Tenyrate I thort he did. What ar' them chaps edgin' up this way fur, Blackbird? You order 'em back, or I'll turn this weepoon on you, an' fill you so full of balls that you won't git over it quick."

"They are inquisitive. They seek knowledge," said Blackbird. "Let them, too, see how to use the little gun."

"Order 'em back," said Bill, putting the revolver close to Blackbird's prominent nose. "Do it quick, or durn my eyes an' buttons ef I don't make cat's meat of you so quick you won't know what hurt you."

Blackbird reluctantly waved his hand, and the ardent seekers after knowledge retired, considerably crestfallen at the failure of their little scheme, which was to steal upon the white men while in conference with Blackbird, and ride them down before they could use their revolvers. But Buckskin Bill was too old a trapper to be caught by so shallow a schemer.

"You came for our revolvers, did you?" said Bill. "Why, do you think we are nat'ral fools, or what? When we've got weepoons fit to fight the hell Blackfoot tribe, did you think we'd give 'em up to thirty or forty? I give you credit for more sense."



"Will you not give the little gun to Blackbird? He will be your friend forever."

"Kain't think of it. You mont ez well give it up. By the way, you was a-lookin' into a camp over thar. Do you happen to know that every darned man has got one of these yer little guns? What chance would you and your painted thieves have ag'in' men like that? Now I warn you to keep away from them, 'cause ef you don't, durn me ef I don't call 'em together and ride down into yer villages and wipe the Black-foot nation from the face of the universal airth. I will, by gravy!"

Blackbird shrugged his shoulders. Being somewhat accustomed to the braggadocio of the trappers, he was not particularly awed by the threats. After importuning them for some time, and threatening all manner of evil, he rode away and joined his band. But, in spite of his threats, he knew better than to attempt their capture in their present situation, and could not have induced his companions to join him in the assault, if he had been so inclined, and there was nothing for it but to leave them where they were. Blackbird knew that, by abandoning their horses, the two white men could easily elude all search in the passes of the hills. Bill was not surprised when, after a hurried consultation, the Indians gave a farewell whoop and rode back over the ground they had so lately passed, to pick up their wounded and bury their dead comrade.

"What kind of men are these you've got with you, boss?" said Buckskin Bill. "Are they border-men, or are they greenhorns?"

"Not greenhorns, I hope."

"Mont be as full of book-larnin' as a dog is full of fleas, and be greenhorns jist the same," said the guide. "It stands to reason, you know, that a man kain't know all about the passes of these yer hills, unless he's camped and fou't and trapped among 'em years and years."

"Well, I suppose you would class some of my men as greenhorns, then," said Aubrey. "There is not one of them who is not a good soldier, who can not hit a mark with a rifle at two hundred yards, and with a pistol at twelve paces; but they are not all Indian-fighters, and half of them know little or nothing of prairie-craft."



"What did ye bring them kind of boys out hyar for?" said Bill, in high disdain. "I reckoned you hed more gumption then thet; durn my buttons ef I didn't, 'cause I seen you fight, and you ar' a cool one. Do you happen to know what Blackbird means to do? Ef we was to stay away from them boys to-night, he'd have every hoss and mule, and every skulp, mebbe, before nine o'clock. 'Thet's what he's arter."

"Then let us hurry to their aid. They are waiting for me."

"Easy, stranger, easy. You don't s'pose Blackbird took all his men away, do you? I sorter reckon thar's ez many ez a dozen hid in the rushes along the bank thar, waitin' for us to come out. Which we won't, nohow."

"I must go to the aid of my men."

"I want you to. But don't let's make fools of ourselves. Thar's more'n one way out'n these hyar hills."

"I trust myself entirely to you," said Clinton. "All I ask is that you will act quickly, for I am anxious about my men."

Instead of leaving by the same course they had take in entering the hills, Buckskin Bill turned the head of the mustang up the pass, and rode, for more than a mile, through a rough and devious path, emerging upon the other side of the low range of hills, which ran out nearly at right-angles to the river. As they rode, the guide said little, and Clinton Aubrey, who had learned something of the habits of these border-men, did not pester him with questions. They emerged upon the bank of the river, in a little semi-circular glade, hemmed in by the hills.

"Got a lariat, hain't ye?" said Bill.

"Yes," replied Aubrey.

"Corral yer hoss, then. We kain't go no farther on horse-back."

"Just as you say, though I do not wish to lose my horse if it can be avoided."

"We kin come back hyar and git 'em ef we kin git clear of the durned Blackfeet. I know whar your fellers are camped; passed it this mornin' when I kum up the river. Make the hoss fast, so that he kain't stray."

Of course the mustang which Buckskin Bill had "seques-



trated" had a lasso hanging at his saddle-bow. No Indian would ride without one. Bill cut a stake and drove it into the ground, tying one end of the lariat to the bridle and the other to the stake. Clinton followed his example, and the animals were secured. Bill now led the way to the river-bank, and found a light cottonwood log, which had been rolled up by the current. Upon this log he placed his rifle, shot-pouch and powder-flask. His revolver he placed in his beaver cap, and asked Clinton for his, which he placed in the same receptacle.

"Kin you swim?" he asked.

Clinton nodded quietly, and the two passed into the river, side by side, or rather with the log between them. The swift current soon took them off their feet, and swimming stoutly, they reached the other bank.

"'Tain't more than two mile to your camp from this," said Bill. "The river bends like a bow hyar, and I know'd the Blackfeet would have to follow the bend, ef they kept on that side of the stream. We cross the neck, and it ain't a quarter ez fur. Now come along."

"Why did you not cross with the horses?" asked Clinton.

"Wait till you see the road we've got to travel and you won't ask that," replied Bill. "We kin climb it, but hosses kaib't. In the first place, we've got to climb this hyar bluff."

Clinton looked upward with a comical face, as he saw the prospect before them. From the narrow ledge where they stood the bluff rose like a wall, with irregularities here and there, where an adventurous climber might find foothold. But the task was by no means an easy one, incumbered as they were with their weapons. There was no time to waste, and they commenced the perilous ascent, clinging to places where a cat could hardly have found foothold. They had hardly gained ten feet up the bluff when there came from above them a horrible cry, something between the sound of the human voice and the maniac laughter of the bald-headed eagle, and a heavy body came whirling down the steep above them, and struck the earth below with a dull thump. They looked down and saw at their feet the dead body of an Indian in his war-paint, a horrible sight to gaze upon, for his head had been shattered by striking against the rocks. They stopped at once,



and waited for new developments; but they heard no sound.

"Let's git back," whispered Bill. "I want to look at that Injun."

They hurried down, and turning the dead warrior face uppermost, they looked at him closely. Beyond the bruises which he had received in his fall, and a fractured skull, caused by striking the rocks, there was no mark to indicate violence upon him. How had he fallen? Had a human hand hurled him down the bluff, or had he fallen by accident? The cry they had heard might have been wrung from him in his imminent danger, or it might have burst from the throat of the being who hurled him from the cliff. The warrior who had fallen was a man of stalwart frame, and no weak hand could have overcome him. Bill looked up with a baffled air, with his hand upon the breast of the corpse, and spoke in a low, hushed voice.

"I reckon I know the hand that throw'd him over the bluff," said he. "It ain't anybody but the White Demon."

"The White Demon?"

"Never heard of him, I reckon. Thar ain't a Blackfoot that lopes upon the plains, or skulks in the hills, but what knows and fears him. A strange critter, by all accounts. No man kin claim he ever see'd him, and yit we find his marks everywhar. I've found Blackfeet lyin' as ef they was asleep, and crept up to raise the'r ha'r. When I pounced on 'em I'd find 'em stone dead. That's the strangest thing about it, you know. The men he kills ain't got nothin' to show how they come to ther death."

"No marks of violence?"

"Not a mark. How the critter does it, I don't pretend to say. I've turned his work over and over, and s'arched and s'arched, but it ain't been no use. I never could find nothin'."

"Strange."

"You bet. You needn't take my word for it. I ain't the only one of the boys that has struck his work layin' asleep upon the trail, dead as a door-nail. I'm a-thinkin' this Injun is done loping for all time, darn him."

"Have we any thing to fear from this White Demon, as you call him?" said Clinton.



"He don't tech white humans. That ain't his gait, you understand. It's Blackfeet he's particular keerful about rubbing out wherever he meets 'em, and he does it putty, too. I'd give this year's trappin' to know how he does it, but it ain't no use. Mebbe I wouldn't rub out the whole Blackfoot tribe ef I could! I don't owe 'em no good-will. But come, this ain't business, this ain't. Let's be gitting on our way."

They again addressed themselves to the ascent of the bluff, and reached the top after arduous labor. Here they found the marks of a desperate struggle, as if two men had tramped up and down the bluff in a deadly grapple. The turf was disturbed by moccasin-tracks of great size, evidently made in the struggle. Bill shook his head and led the way over a rocky and perilous path until they struck the river again, at a point where the smoke of a camp-fire rose against the summer sky.

"Them your men?" asked Bill.

Clinton took out a pocket-glass and examined the camp, which was yet half a mile away. Satisfied that it was his own, he told Bill it was all right, and they hurried to the river and signaled the camp. A rude raft was quickly pushed out from the shore, by means of which they were quickly transported to the other side.

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## CHAPTER III.

STELLA RAY.

A STRANGE camp it was, and such a one as can only be found upon the plains of the Far West, where men of all nations find a refuge and a home. Yankee, negro, Irishman, Dutchman and Mexican, formed this strange band of brothers. They were grouped carelessly about the fires, drinking and smoking and chattering among themselves. The Mexicans lounged about in picturesque attitudes, laughing but seldom, while the more volatile Frenchmen and negroes made the air vocal with their laughter. Here a lean, long-visaged Yankee



could be seen regaling his hearers with some marvelous adventure of which he had been the hero, telling a wonderful lie without a change of expression. Buckskin Bill at once joined one of these parties, with the free and easy way peculiar to free trappers, and listened to the Yankee's tale, while Clinton stood near looking on with an amused smile.

"Seen a great deal of life, ain't ye?" said Bill, at length, when he had stood the sublime lies of the Yankee as long as he could. "'Pear to hev been round the world a good deal."

"Yaas," said the Yankee, "I've traveled some, that's a fact."

"Yit what you jest told ain't a flea-bite to my experience," said Bill. "It's jest nothin' at all."

"But that ain't the best I've got tew tell, is it, say?" bawled the Yankee. "That's only a beginnin', that is! We was a-talkin' about suspended animation, wasn't we?"

"What is suspended animation?" said one of the men.

"Why, you born fool, don't you know?" replied another, in high scorn. "It's a man strung up by the neck. Now, s'pose the boys was to ketch you a-stealin' a hoss—an' like ez not they will—an' was to hang you up to that little tree, you'd be suspended animation, you would."

"You bet he would," was the universal chorus. "Ain't that what it means, Yankee Josh?"

"No 'tain't," replied Josh. "Fur from it, I mout say. Suspended animation means when a man looks to be dead, so still that you can't see him breathe a bit, and who gits back his breath arter a while, and walks. Waal, I was tellin' about a woman that lived down to Portland that dropped off that way, and laid for nine days without a motion or a breath. Cold as a stun, she was, but when she woke up she thought she hadn't bin asleep an hour. Fact!"

"Lie!" said Bill.

"Who said that?" demanded Yankee Josh, fiercely, grasping a stick which lay at his feet.

"I said it," said Bill, coolly.

"Say it ag'in, and say it kinder slow, so that I kin understand ye."

"I said 'twas a lie."



"That's a fact," said Yankee Josh. "I know'd it was a lie all the time. It ain't my story; quarrel with the man that wrote the book I read it in. I ain't got nothin' to dew with it."

"You're a cute varmint, any way," said Buckskin Bill, admiringly. "Darned ef ye ain't. I'm ekal to most of 'em in tellin' a good square lie, but you lay over me, I guess. Howsomever, here goes for one try at you, anyhow. I used to go to Mexico, some years back, and when I was thar they executed a couple of men. Don't know what the rascals did, but I ain't got the least bit of doubt they orter been hung years before. Howsomever, these men wasn't hung, but had their heads chopped off with a reg'lar old jack-knife of a thing they called a guillotine, that sliced 'em off as neat as wax. I stood nigh when they shortened them by the head, and ez a greaser or so more or less ain't no sort of 'count to me, I didn't mind it. That ain't what I cum for, you know. But that mornin' a Mexican doctor I know'd asked me to cum into his office and hired me to stand by to help him when the time cum, cause he'd bought the right to make experiments with them ar' bodies. Course I didn't keer; 'twan't none of my funeral, you perceive, so I was thar. When the time cum the doctor yelled to me, and I snatched up a head and clapped it on one of the bodies and held it thar while the doctor fixed it on somehow, and then we laid it on a board, kivered it up, and four men started on a run with it to the doctor's office, whar they laid it on a bed. I follered them on a run, and old Alivero cum up puffing like a dying bufler. He'd got a thing he called a 'lectrical battory,' you never see'd such a darned masheen, all kivered over with brass fixin's that shone like gold. Well, he put one eend of a chain round the dead man's neck—he was dead, gentlemen, an' no mistake—an' put another on his hand. Then he set one of the men to turn a crank, and that turned a big glass wheel in a silk bag. When he did that the blood began to start from under the skin whar the head was put on, and the only way the doctor had to stop it was to coat it over with some sort of plaster or other, durn me ef I know what, and that stopped the bleeding. Gentlemen, I stood thar watchin' that corpse, and by gravy my blood turned to water when I seen his nose twitch, and the doctor put his hand on his breast.



"His heart beats!" yelled the doctor.

"Them critters the doctor hired to bring the body would have lit out, but we wasn't goin' to hev no such nonsense as that, so I clapped the door to, an' swore I'd let daylight through the fast man that tried to run. That kept 'em quiet, fur the greasers sort o' respected me, you bet. Then one of them went back shaking, and turned the crank ag'in. Then I see the body twitch all over, and its legs jerk, and I wanted to light out myself, but darn my buttons ef I was goin' to show the white feather before a lot of greasers, so I stuck. I locked that door so thet the durned fools couldn't run, and turned the crank myself. They fainted away in sections, so to speak, and the old ruffian of a doctor and me had it all to ourselves, me grinding away at the crank, and he jumping about like a basy old thief ez he was. But, stars and garters, ef he didn't yell when he seen the body sit up and stare at us. Then I see what a durned mistake we'd made. Darn me ef we hadn't put on the head with its face to the back.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the trappers. "That's a good 'un."

"Twan't that so much, nuther," said Buckskin Bill, "but when I cum to look at him I see I'd made another mistake. Ef I didn't go and put the wrong head on the body I don't want a cent. Yes, sir, thar was Cospetto's head on Avelino's body, and him alive and sneezing, sitting on the table, with his back to us, and his durned face looking right at us.

"Hullo," sez I. "What's the deal now? You ain't the right man!"

"I'd like to know what the devil you are doing with me," said Cospetto-Avelino, putting his hand up to his neck and feeling all round. "It's my opinion you are up to some trick, and *corpo di Baccho*, I won't stand it at all!"

"Who are you any way," sez I? "I'm durned ef I know. That's Cospetto's head, but it ain't Cospetto's body, by no means."

"I believe you lies," said this half-and-half, getting off the table slowly. "Hullo. You've turned my head round."

"All the better for you, ain't it? You kin see to walk backwards now, and you never could afore."



"The notion kinder tickled the old villains—I kain't help speakin' as ef thar was two of 'em—and he laughed and backed up to me to shake hands.

"'Paws off,' sez I. 'No liberties afore strangers. I'd rather you wouldn't tech me.'

"'Why?' sez he, gruffly.

"'Cause I'm in a fix about you. I promised to wring Avelino's nose the fast time I met him, but this ain't Avelino's head at all, so how the devil am I to do it? Besides, your head ain't on very tight, and I might wring it off.'

"So we parted good friends. Avelino-Cospetto lives on the Rio Grande now, and every one knows that it all happened jest ez I tell you. 'Tain't much of a story, but it's the best I've got."

"'Pears like you can't invent a bit," said Yankee Josh, with a queer smile. "You was cognizant to all them sarcumstances individually, was you?"

"Wha-a-a-t? Say that ag'in!"

"You extended your personal attention over the remarkable event you have just narrated for our edification?"

"Now see yer," said Bill. "I'm a peaceable man nat'rally, but you rile me up and you make trouble in this camp. Don't be a fool now. Talk common sense."

"Did yew see this yourself?"

"Is that what you wanted to know?"

"Of course."

"Then why the devil didn't you say so. Cogni— Oh, holy Moses! Yaa, I see'd it myself. But, Lord love your heart, that ain't no story, that ain't. I've seen men hung in Arkansas for telling better stories than that. If you kain't do any better, thar's a painful vacuum in this camp, and the sooner we git trampled on by a herd of bufler the better for the world."

"Oh, git east! Thun-der; look at that. Who is that?"

"Blest ef it ain't my little gal," said the trapper. "Now what in thunder did she come yer for, right in the teeth of danger?"

He sprang up and hurried to meet a young girl who had just ridden into camp, and sat in her saddle, casting a sweeping glance over the place. By an involuntary impulse, every



man in the camp rose, and saluted, as if to a superior officer. And well they might, for she was a veritable forest beauty. Her figure was slight, but framed with surpassing grace. Every rounded limb was perfection, and her form would have driven a sculptor mad. The face was piquant enough to be enchanting, and when the wind tossed her black ringlets about her flushed face it made her doubly beautiful. Her costume was of buckskin, with an overskirt of some dark brown stuff, surmounted by a jacket of embroidered fawn's hide. In one hand she held her bridle, and in the other a small rifle of beautiful workmanship.

Her feet were clad in dainty moccasins worked with Indian skill. Upon her head she wore a scottische bonnet with a single eagle-plume thrust in the front. Altogether, it was an astounding apparition to the camp of Clinton Ambrey, who had not dreamed of seeing a woman after they left the last fort, except the Indian women, and even these were seldom seen. But this beautiful vision sat in the saddle, looking about her with an eager smile until her eyes rested upon the face of Buckskin Bill, when she bounded from the saddle, and ran to throw her arms about his neck, with a hysterical cry.

"I've been frightened, father," she cried. "Why have you staid away from me so long when you know I get tired waiting for you in the cave?"

"Don't know ez that give you any sort of right to come out of camp, and resk being taken by the Blackfeet?" said Bill, as angrily as he could.

"Ah, is there a horse in the whole Blackfoot nation which could run with my pretty Fleetwing?"

"Pethaps not," said Clinton, speaking for the first time. "But you might be surprised."

"Not a bit. I am too well practiced in Indian ways."

"Bill," said Clinton, "introduce me to this lady."

"My darter," said Bill, rather gruffly. "But don't you mind her now, for the gal is put out about something, and I don't reckon I kin find out what it is, cause she's contrary when she has a mind to be."

"Your daughter?"

"Yes. What d'ye see so queer in that? Ain't a free trapper a right to a darter?"



"But, this is something extraordinary, and you must excuse me if I am surprised. Your daughter did not spring from the earth, did she?"

"No; she rode up from the foot-hills on her horse Fleetwing, and is tired to death of you already. Do come away, father, and let us go home. This young man is a Yankee, I know, because he asks so many questions."

"What's got into you to-night, my pretty?" said Buckskin Bill, soothingly. "Don't be hard on Capt'in Aubrey. He kin ride, and shoot and fight like a man. Once you know him you won't talk *that way* to him."

"Let's go away, father," persisted the girl. "I don't want to stay in this camp."

"Then you orter staid at home. I've as good as promised the capt'in to stand by him, and see him safe through the Blackfoot country. Now I don't want you to go with me. That's meat enough in the cave to last you six months, and ef I don't come back in one, you saddle Fleetwing, and strike the home trail. I'll let you ride safe through, and that no man will have the spunk to lay a finger on you, nuther."

"I don't think he would," she said, proudly, drawing up her slight form to its full height. "No man ever insulted Stella Ray yet. But enough of this. If you go through the Blackfoot country, so do I."

"But consider the danger," said Clinton, who was in a maze at this young creature's beauty and daring. "The country swarms with hostile Indians."

"Does it? As if I did not know that."

"Then the distance—"

"I do not propose to walk, sir. I have my horse."

"You are incorrigible, I fear. This is a rough place for a lady. My men are rough and rude, and may say things unsuited to your ears."

"You wrong our border-men," she said, in a clear, ringing voice. "There is not one in your camp who would say a word to me he would not have said in the presence of his mother when he was a child. There, I am enrolled in your brigade."

And the new recruit coolly untied the lariat and tethered her horse upon the prairie among the other beasts.



## CHAPTER IV.

## A PERILOUS HOUR.

THE men looked on in mute bewilderment for a moment, and then the more volatile among them began to laugh, and the laugh was echoed by the beautiful girl, who came among them with an independent swagger, founded upon the free-trapper style, toying with a dainty pistol which hung in a spangled belt about her waist.

"I'm a surprise to you all, men," she said, looking about her. "What of that, when the world is full of surprises of one kind or another? Now I am with you, and must stay with you, until we pass through the Blackfoot country, and I expect you to make my words good, and not put me to the blush by any thing you say or do. If that was to happen, even if we were in the most dangerous passes in the Indian country, I would mount my horse and ride away from you, and if I fell, my blood would be upon your heads. Enough; you all understand me."

The men cheered lustily, and not a man among these rough, untutored souls but felt that for such a woman he could even dare to die. Buckskin Bill had not said a word, and some one near wondered why he did not interpose his authority and prevent the girl from going with them.

"Interpose my— Holy Fly! you don't know what yer talking about, Gabe Rodgers, or you wouldn't make such a durned foolish remark. I hain't got no call to order Stell to do this and not to do that. She will do just as she reckons to be right, I opinionate."

"I didn't know you were married," said one of the trappers.

"*Didn't ye?* Oh!" said Bill, scornfully.

"I thought I hearn you say one't that you never was f'ined in them holy bonds."

"You durned old chowder-head of a clam," said Bill, in high wrath, "it wouldn't take much for me to bu'st you right



square in the snoot. I'd do it, too, ef it wasn't for splashing your blood all over the camp."

Gabe Rogers was a game chicken, and when he heard this hasty crow he rose and flapped his wings. A battle between the two guides seemed imminent, when a warning cry from the outposts let them know that danger was at hand. Instantly every man sought cover under the river-bank, which formed a capital earth-work, and peered out at the danger. It came in a shape they had least expected—a herd of buffaloes, of countless numbers, rushing down across the plain, bent upon reaching the stream. Such a herd as Cooper might have described in his best days, with gleaming eyes and heaving flanks, they came plunging on, mad with terror, for hanging on their flanks, plying spear and arrow, a band of Indian hunters might be seen.

"The devil!" roared Buckskin Bill. "Take to the trees, boys, you that kin. Still, come hyar, I'll see arter you."

The girl ran to him, and he was about to place her on the raft and push off, when he became conscious that there was not a moment to lose, for the head of the column was scarcely a hundred yards away. Putting Stella on the raft, he gave it a vigorous push and sprung after her. The raft floated down the current with considerable speed, and Bill looked back to catch a glimpse of his companions. Some had secured their horses and were swimming the stream; others had taken to the trees, all unseen by the Indians harassing the flanks of the herd, who had not dreamed of the proximity of a white camp, until one of them caught a glimpse of a white face peering out of a tree top, and fitted an arrow which he sent through the shoulder of the trapper. The answer was a rifle-ball which laid the Indian dead in his tracks. High above the roar of the buffaloes rose the wild cries of the astonished Indians, as they fell back in dismay. As luck would have it, only the extreme edge of the herd of buffalo had struck the camp, and most of the Indians were on the other side. This solitary individual had paid the penalty of being too forward.

"Rubbed out!" said the trapper who had fired the shot. "Wonder how he liked it?"

The herd of buffalo, interposed between the Indians and



their adversaries, and rushing on in a continued stream, prevented them from joining battle, and they could only shout defiance at each other across the narrow space, and shake their weapons threateningly. The trappers hurled choice epithets at each other and at the Indians, who, in turn, howled like demons as they were.

The herd rushed on, plunging in desperation into the stream, which at this place did not rise above their shoulders. But the hindmost animals pressed upon those in front, and forced them forward at such a speed that many of them were drowned in the course of transit, and carried downward by the waves, which swelled to receive them. Buckskin Bill stood upon the raft directing it in its downward course by means of the pole, and watching with interest the movements of the Indians, who, being engaged with the trappers upon the other side of the herd, did not observe him. Stella, who was naturally brave, sat upon the raft watching as keenly as her father, and ready appearing to enjoy the wild scene before her, when she felt the raft shake, and the next moment a painted savage bounded upon it, hatchet and knife in his belt. It was Blackbird, the chief who had assailed the two men upon the prairie that very morning. Evidently, he had not expected to see Stella, for he recoiled with a gesture of surprise and pleasure, for no man appreciates female loveliness more than the Indian. Buckskin Bill heard the low, guttural exclamation, and turning quickly, he faced the savage, who advanced eagerly to the fray, and the two men grappled upon the raft, struggling to attain the mastery.

The iron sinews of the trapper-guide had been often tried severely, but never in his life had he felt his weakness as much as now, in the grasp of Blackbird. There was little room for their close and silent evolutions, and they stood like gladiators, straining for the throw. Down they went at length, with Buckskin Bill on top. But the fall was not necessarily a defeat, for the body of the Indian slipped like an eel from the grasp of the guide, who could only hold him by seizing him about the neck, a grip which he succeeded in obtaining at last. Neither of them had attempted the use of a weapon; indeed, so close had been the grapple, that it was simply impossible. At length the hatchet dropped from the grasp of



Blackbird, and Stella snatched it up quickly, and bending over the struggling couple, waited for an opportunity to strike. It was not given soon, for so rapid were their evolutions that it was impossible to strike without wounding her father. But Stella waited patiently and coolly until the proper time came, when both ceased their struggles from sheer exhaustion, when she struck full at his head. A savage "Ugh!" burst from the lips of Blackbird, and he released his hold upon Bill and dropped bleeding upon the logs.

Backskin Bill rose slowly to his feet, shook himself like a man who was quite wet, looked dubiously at the savage bleeding at his feet, and again took up the steering-pole.

"The durned critter," he muttered.

"Do you know him, then?" she said.

"Ryther. It's Blackbird, chief of the Blackfeet."

"That horrible wretch?"

"That's a matter of taste. He don't think he's no sech horrible wretch, by a durned sight. Among the women of his tribe, he's quite a dandy, but a brave one. He won't lope no more, he won't."

"Is he dead?" said Stella, in a hushed voice. "I didn't mean to kill him, indeed I did not. I only thought to help you."

"Yer a brave gal. You struck out like a man, and you didn't strike wild, as most any man I ever see would be apt to do. You jest waited until the right time come, and then struck."

"I have killed a man," murmured Stella. "Father, it is terrible to take the life of a human being."

"Human being! You shet up, now. They ain't human, Blackfeet ain't, no more'n buffler. Lor', I always thort you know'd that they warn't human. I c'd 'a' told ye that any time. Blackfeet human! Wal, that is a good one."

As he spoke he heard a splash in the water close at hand, and turning, saw that Blackbird had disappeared. The wily savage was cunning enough to lie quiet until a favorable opportunity occurred, and then rolled off into the water. Bill uttered an angry oath, and seizing his rifle, waited for the savage to rise to the surface. He did so at length, but it was a hundred feet astern, as he had been swimming viciously



up-stream while under water. Bill had his rifle ready, and pulled, but no report followed. Calculating on this, the savage had managed while lying across the weapon, to slip the cap from the tube. While Bill was fumbling angrily for a cap, the Indian buried himself in the rushes upon the river-bank, and was safe.

"What did I tell you?" roared Bill. "Do you call *that* human?"

"What, father?"

"Greasing off in that sort of a sneaking way, when by rights his durned old scalp was my property, so to speak."

"Do you blame him for escaping?"

"Blame him? Of course I do. Nobody but a nat'ral born thief of the world like him, would hev been guilty of it. I'd orter hed my own head bu'sted for not giving him a finishing clip."

"I am not sorry he escaped, father; I really am not, for I should have no peace if I knew that I had killed a man. Let him go, and we ought to be thankful that it is no worse, and that my weak arm was able to strike a blow to free you from that ruffian's grasp. Look out; the buffaloes are floating down this way."

"What I'm more afraid of is, that them Injuns will come a-raining and a-charging down this way too. The boys are keeping them busy jest now. I wish the devil had them bufflers, a-keeping us from jining our party. What's that? Look, Stella; on both sides."

The cause of his alarm was manifest. A dozen or more Indians had appeared up the river-bank, and were looking at them with longing eyes. Buckskin Bill thrust the pole into the bottom of the river, and called to Stella to do the same at the other end, and they held the raft fast where it was. This could not serve them if the Indians began to use their bows, but this was evidently not their intention, for they were consulting hurriedly together. In a moment more Blackbird joined them, and from the shout of joy which at once arose, Bill was satisfied they were a part of his band.

"Oh, blame my cats ef this ain't too bad, now. Ef we had kept that pesky chief they wouldn't dar' to tech us. Now we ar' up a stump."



"What will you do?"

"Nothing; let 'em take us."

"Without a fight?"

"If we kill three or four of 'em, it will only be the worse for us."

"I suppose you are right, father, but I would sooner die than fall into the hands of the monster who was here just now."

"Don't you fret, little 'un. I'll save you somehow, though I kain't figure it out jest now. Lord love your heart alive, ef them bufflers wa'n't in the way I'd show you how to do it. I'd go up the stream like a shot."

"But when you got to the buffalo-herd—what then?"

"I'd show you a trick. I ain't no guy, ef I *do* have *fits*. What do you say, I leave it in your hands now, shall we give up or try a desperate thing to jine our comrades, a deed which will be a dre'dful danger, but can only be death anyhow, and may save us."

"Action!" cried the heroic girl, with sparkling eyes. "Never surrender."

"That's what I call pluck, then," muttered Bill. "I kin trust you, my daughter. We kin only try it, and ef we fail, at best it can be no more than death, as I said afore, and death together will be better than life with them critters yonder. Hev you got strength enough to help push up-stream?"

"Try me," cried Stella.

"Up with your stick, then, and push with a will."

The Indians on the shore were just preparing to make an attempt to seize the raft and its occupants, when they saw it begin to move up-stream, under the united efforts of the heroic girl and her brave father. Blackbird only laughed, for he knew that they could not pass the herd of buffalo, still passing steadily through the flood, like the host of the children of Israel through the Red Sea.

"They come back," he said. "Can't go through buffalo."

Yet they pushed on as resolutely as if they really intended to pass through the herd, and with a shout of surprise the Indians saw them thrust the raft in among the stragglers upon the edge of the herd. Stella saw herself surrounded by a multitude of shaggy heads, short, curving horns, and



glittering eyes. Ahead of them the mass of moving bodies was so dense, that it completely concealed the river from view. The Indians were now rushing up the banks of the stream, knowing that when Buckskin Bill was forced to come out from among the herd, he would be near the shore upon one side or the other, but they did not make due allowance for the indomitable courage of the man they followed. He was pushing the raft slowly onward, looking at the dense black mass in front, as hard to pass through as a wall, and nerving himself for the final moment. The buffaloes were getting angry at the presence of the raft, and one or two had given it a vicious stroke with their horns in passing, and one had manifested a desire to mount the raft. Bill picked up his rifle, the last thing a trapper leaves as a prey to the enemy, and strapped it upon his back.

"Are you ready, Stella?" he cried.

"Ready," replied the girl, promptly.

Without a word more, he seized her in his arms, and bounding from the raft, lighted upon the back of the nearest buffalo. Of course the position was not tenable for a moment, and as the fierce animal snorted and plunged wildly, his unwelcome rider bounded to another hump, rising invitingly two feet away. It was a terrible, and yet a grand sight, to see this bold, brave man, with set teeth, flying hair, and firmly fixed face, leaping from buffalo to buffalo, choosing his beast with perfect nicety, and making his leaps with the greatest care, when he knew that a misstep would be death to him and her. The girl, too, was grand. Her face did not show any of that foolish terror which seems a part of woman's nature, but had a bright, determined look about it which was sublime. Behind them the Indians howled a dismal chorus, for they felt that whether they escaped or not, their prey had eluded them. Once they saw Buckskin Bill slip upon the back of one huge beast, wet by the dashing stream, but instead of falling he dropped upon one knee, clinging to the long hair upon the buffalo's neck until he recovered his balance, and then boarded on. The white men on the shore cheered them to the echo, while the Indians answered with despairing yells. But Buckskin Bill never flinched, and through that forest of tossing horns and glaring eyes, he bore his darling toward the



shore. At length he reached a place where the herd was more scattered and his leaps longer. But he was now near the shore. As he gathered himself for the final effort, there was a rush of men, and the two were snatched from their perilous position, and landed safe, but out of breath, upon the trampled grass.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE WHITE DEMON.

YELLS of rage and disappointment showed that although the Indians appreciated the gallantry of the act by which the Buckskin trapper had escaped, they were far from pleased with it. The hunting-party which had just come up were a part of the band of Blackbird; they had been separated from him in the morning and knew nothing of the plans of the chief, or they would not have followed the herd in such a way as to throw his plans out of gear. They were dancing about angrily on the other side of the herd, which was now passing rapidly, when Buckskin Bill reached the bank.

"Come down from them trees, *you*," yelled the trapper. "Timber's a good thing enough, but don't sneak. Come out an' be men; I would if I was you. Don't sneak, for I can't bear it. Durn them Injuns."

The men who had been trained upon the prairie had not taken to the trees, and they quickly gathered about the guide, who was not a whit frightened at his recent danger. Those in the trees descended and scattered themselves through the timber, just as the last buffalo plunged into the river, when the Indians, thinking to take them by surprise, made a charge. But a close volley poured in at the right moment, drove them back to the cover of the other scattered timber and the rushes on the bank. The voice of the chief was now heard calling angrily to his men, and they kept quiet in their cover.

"That means for them to lay low and keep dark," said Bill. "He ain't no fool, that Blackbird. I sorter reckon thar ain't his ekal hyarabouts, and they wouldn't hev made



that rush at us jest now, ef he had been with 'em. He were on the other side of the river. How do you feel, Stell?"

"I wish some one would look at my arm," replied Stella, calmly. "I think I am hit with an arrow."

It looked like it, certainly. A barbed arrow had passed through the fleshy part of the fore-arm, and the blood was dropping slowly, staining her fanciful dress. Buckskin Bill uttered a cry, and put his hands before his face, as he could not bear the sight of her flowing blood. Clinton Aubrey came forward with a pale face and asked to look at her arm. "I am a surgeon," he said, "and know what to do."

"I am not afraid," she said, with a bright smile, though the pain must have been great. "Do not think me a baby, to faint at the loss of my own blood. There."

He took the beautiful hand in his and laid her arm in the palm of his hand and looked at the arrow. It was a stray shaft which had struck her, for no one believed that even a Blackfoot would have aimed a shaft at her. The point had passed completely through, and showed upon the underside of the wounded limb, but the barbs still hung to the flesh.

"I am afraid I must hurt you a little," said he. "I must push the arrow through the flesh, as it is impossible to draw it back."

"Don't," said Bill, faintly. "I'll lick you ef you hurt her, durned ef I don't."

"Why don't you uncover your face, father?" said Stella. "Don't fear for your wild daughter. You have taught me better than to fear a wound like this, and the Blackfeet do not poison their arrows. Come and help Captain Aubrey to remove the shaft."

"I kain't, Stell; you know I kain't," replied the trapper, without removing his hands. "Don't ask it of me, neyther. Why don't you get it done, durn you? You know I kain't b'ar it, nohow."

Clinton beckoned to the Yankee, who was standing near, and he came up to assist.

"Turn your head away," whispered Clinton. "It won't hurt you much, if you don't see it done."

She shook her head, and Aubrey forced the the sharp blade through the flesh, while she gave no evidence of the great pain



it caused her beyond a slight start. Then he broke off the head close to the flesh, and drew out the broken shaft. An Indian guide now came forward and produced a sort of salve much used on wounds of this kind upon the border, and they made a bandage, which was tightly bound about her arm. Clinton had a handkerchief wound about his waist, which he took off and formed into a sling, which he placed about the neck of the brave girl. - -

"Is it done?" asked Bill.

"All right," replied Clinton, and Bill removed his hands with a sigh of relief.

"I kin't thank you for doing that job so neatly, now, captain," he said, "but I'll find a time to do it in a way you kin appreciate. I'm too darned mad at them Blackfeet. I sorter reckon they'd better look out for me now, for darn my hide ef I don't git my revenge out of them for this day's work. Shoot at a gal, eh?" he shouted, shaking his fist at the cover in which the Blackfeet had found refuge. "I'll make ye sick for that."

The Indians were drawing off rapidly, for they had no hope of doing any great harm to the party, now that they were on their guard, but hoped to be able to make a night attack which would at least carry off some of the horses. The greenhorns of the party were determined to rush out and seize the opportunity to drive the Blackfeet into the river, but they were restrained by the stern voice of Buckskin Bill.

"Come back thar, you born idiots," he cried. "You'd provoke the life out of a saint, you fellers would. Fust you climb trees to git away from the Injuns, and then you want to rush out from cover and git riddled with arrers. It would serve you right to let you go, but your carcasses may serve a better purpose." -

The raft which had been abandoned by the guide had been taken possession of by some of the savages, who could now be seen by the party crossing the river near the point where Buckskin had ordered the raft to attack Buckskin Bill. Two or three hot-headed fellows raised their rifles and would have fired at the party, but the guide stopped them again.

"Nothin' won't suit you unless I knock your brains out, you great gumpies. Now what's the use? I don't count an In-



just nothing, but he ain't shoot an' cheer from a bird, and what's the use of that? I'm wif' that way too? Let up, you'll find out, do. I never did see such fellows. You ain't got a gun and I'll go through you like salis."

"I thought you had! Blackfoot," growled the man whose weapon the guide struck up.

"S'pose I do? That ain't a good reason for citing the hell-birding of us into trouble, is it? Now don't fool with me, 'cause I'm just real craft to make you sorry for it afterwards."

The man desisted, and all stood watching the party on the raft. They were five in number, and had left their horses upon the other side when they crossed to join in the assault upon the white men. Perhaps fifteen feet separated them from the bank, when a wild cry was heard and the gigantic figure of a white man loomed suddenly upon the raft, in the midst of the astonished savages, and a furious combat commenced. The new comer crouched in his hand a powerful club, with which he made terrible work among the Blackfeet. The first blow of the red-throated weapon swept three of them to the river, but the other three clung to him like cats, and struck desperate blows with knife and hatchet. Then the place where they stood, seeing the blows he received, it was reported to the white men that this strange being did not feel. On the contrary, he seemed to pay no attention to their blows, but shooting out his long arm, grasped the strongest of the three who assailed him by the throat and dragged him from his hold, shrieking for help. In vain. The giant arm of the white foe rose above his head and hurled the Blackfoot into the boiling water in which the raft was floating. The other two were now free, but as the last survivor of the savages crouched, and cried out the savages back like arrows. A host of the mighty warriors of the Blackfeet, and the warriors of the river, the great shot came upon the raft, and the position of the Indian who had been his too, was lost. A yell of rage broke from the river bank, and the men of the White Dawn were better than the breeze to the eyes of the white men above.

"The White Dawn," cried Buckskin Bill. "I know'd it, I know'd it. No one but him could possibly have done it. He!



did you say I might put big Injun over his head? It takes a strong arm to do that."

The Indians were looking anxiously up and down the bank, looking for the White Demon, who, now that his work was done, stood down the stream in the middle of the current, with his back to the bank upon the coast of the rapids, and, at last, longed for some one to reach him with their arms.

"Who is the White Demon?" passed from mouth to mouth, and Bill was besieged by questioners. He had but one answer.

"Whatever he is, you ain't no call to be afraid of him, for he never harms white humans, he don't."

"What then?"

"Be lieve, whatever, he can find them. I never see'd him none in my life, and there ain't a man I ever met that kin say any different. It be strange to me that he show'd himself. See him; the damned cunner is laughing at them."

Still the raft floated on, and the savages moved upon the banks, looking up to it as it floated. A thundering song came up the river, in a deep, resonant tone, from the north of the White Demon. Then, pausing and pausing, they passed out of sight in the next roll of the prairie, and left the white men stranded with a torment upon the river-bank.

"Now is our time," cried Buckskin Bill. "We won't have a chance. Get axes, every man that can use them, for we've got to have a battle agin' them devils when they come back. Good-bye and the salute of the White Demon, any-how, for he has helped us out of a pizen difficulty."

Many of the Indian men were laden down by provisions, and their early starts made quick work with the small parties that went. But it was too dark to work they had built a temporary barrier across the middle of the camp, and left the horses on the river, and the river upon the other side. This was the plan. But, who would have been a mother had her own hands joined hands chosen by heaven, and then, having a plan, would have been a mother for himself and others, though she protested against it.

"You don't say, Sam. It's an off for you to git yourself into a difficulty and then you without trying to catch after it. Don't



know how you kin eat, nuther, with that one hand. Oh, ef I only know'd the Injun that shot the arrer at you, b'iling alive would be easy to the death I'd give him."

Thus grumbling, he put some of the juiciest steaks upon a tin-plate which Clinton Aubrey brought him, and eat it up for her. The rest of the party, with the exception of the guards, were soon busily engaged about the fires, cooking their evening meal. Concealment was useless now, for the Indians knew all about them, so they feasted to their hearts' content.

"Wait till morning and I'll give you a feast," said Bill. "Why, thar'll be bufler enuff to feed a regiment, out thar. You bet on it, men. I'll show you how to cook a bufler-lump, ef you'd like to have me."

No one objected to this. Indeed, it was the universal verdict that this was the best speech they had heard from the lips of Buckskin Bill that day.

Then Stella sat down beside the guide, and rested her fair head upon his knee, while he said he would tell them a story.

"I'm an old man, boys," he said. "Leastways, I begin to feel old, sorter, though mout be I ain't fifty yit. But when a man lives for forty year or more on these plains, it seems a long time to look back on. Thar ain't much change in our life, you know. Injuns, bufler and trappin'; that's all we know much about, somehow. I cum out on the plains with a party when I war twelve year old, and I've lived hyar so long, I've a'most forgot how long it really is, though, as I said afore, it kain't be far from forty year. I did used to try to keep the run of it one't, but I guess I skipped a year or two somewhar. Most of the time, sence then, I've lived in the Injun kentry, between one post and another, trapper and guide, living from hand to mouth, as trappers have to do. What's that you've got in the little flask, capt'in?"

"Brandy," replied Aubrey.

"I don't believe it."

"I tell you it is brandy."

"I don't like to doubt yer word, capt'in," said Bill, slowly. "But I won't take no man's word on so important a subject ez that thar."



"There is only one way to prove it, then," said Aubrey, laughing.

"How's that?"

"By tasting it."

"You bet you," said Bill.

Aubrey gave him the flask, and he raised it to his lips, exhibiting such a degree of power in suction that he must have roused the admiration of the sage "Weller," who said to his son, upon his drinking too great a portion of a quart of ale: "Werry good power of suction, Samivel. You'd have made a remarkably fine cyster, if you'd 'a' bin born in that station of life."

The trapper removed the flask and looked at the captain with a comical eye.

"Well, what is your opinion now?" queried Aubrey.

"I ain't fully satisfied," replied Bill, again raising the flask to his lips. "Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle," went the liquid down his capacious throat, until his next neighbor, who was waiting anxiously, snatched it away.

"What you doing?" yelled Bill. "Don't you know any better than that? Nobody but a born'd fool would interrupt silentlike res'arch. I cawe, capt'in; it is brandy."

"You hain't left enough to sw'ar by," said the individual who had snatched it. "Now, ef ye are goin' to tell us that story, I wish you would. It will be a durned lie, to begin with."

"Will it?" said Bill.

"I'll go my bottom dollar on it," said the other.

"Now look hyar, Si Burrill, I know you, don't I? Want me to jump down yer throat, don't ye? Now look out; I'm b'lied over all the time, and like ez not, I'll light on you party heavy."

"You ain't ekal to it, I opinionate," said the man known as Si Burrill.

"Ain't, eh? Hyar, Stell, let me go, will you? Don't go a-b'lied ef the old man down that way. That ain't fair, you know. He sez I kain't chew him up, and I kin."

"Father!"

"What of it?"

"Did you not promise me not to quarrel?"



"But a man kain't be imposed on, you know," grumbled Bill.

"Si meant no harm. Go on with your story, and don't stop to quarrel."

## CHAPTER VI.

### A MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT.

"GENERALLY gets the upper-hand of the old man, that gold duz," said Bill, pathetically; "and if the old man *zeist* tell the truth, he sort o' likes it. I'm goin' to tell you how I came to find my darter, or rather how such a blessed ez this comes to be with an old trapper out hyar on the prary. It's nigh onto sixteen year ago, or thereabouts, I war campin' up hyar on the North Red. I war alone, you understand, and as the Injan-signs war mighty thick, you bet I kept close. Most be about seven o'clock on a clear night I heard the Blackfeet yell, and I spect I to see them come bu'chin' in upon me, but it didn't come. The Bullabullo was out on the prary, nigh a quarter of a mile away. I'd seen white signs that mornin', and I calculated they was at some camp. 'Twas just about the time they generally come in on a camp, at dusk, or in the early mornin', that's their natural goit. I know'd by the yells I couldn't do no good; they war too many for that, so I wait'd until the noise cooled down, and then I crept down to see about it. I was in a little bush-cover, creepin' along, when the rush of Injans pass'd me, p'raps a hundred in all, and for blood. I know'd it war over then, so I crept down as quiet as I cou'd, and found the camp. Boys, I'm an old trapper, and I've see'd some fearful bad sights, but that war the worst I ever see. It war a small camp, only four in all, two men and two women, dead and scalded. One of the women was young, and the other the wife of some trapper or gambler. I know'd that by her dress. The lady, or she war a lady, war beautiful as an angel, of what I've heard of as good looks for any thing. That she lay, and you wou'd have thought she war asleep, she looked so peaceful. Poor lady, her husband



was soon over. I was looking round and thinking what I'd do, when I heard a feeble little cry from under the wagon, which had been tipped over in the rush. I thought maybe it was some one wounded, and I ran to look. That was a pile of old blankets under the wagon, and I pried 'em over, and ther by a little smokin' creature, holding up her hands for me to take her up. I thought to myself, 'This hyar little lamb lookin' at father n'r mother now; I'd do my best by her.' I picked her up, and thought I'd carry her to camp, and do what I could to keep life in her. I'd got no further than the brakes and I see a horseman coming at full speed toward the camp. He was a tall, stout man, not very old, as I could see, and when he came to the camp he just give one cry, fall of agony, put his hands afore his eyes and run away as fast as his horse could go. I nursed my little blossom tighter and went back to camp. Next mornin' I came thar with a shovel, and thort I'd put 'em in the ground, but he'd been thar afore me, and the work war done. That little gal war still hyar, and I've done my best for her. I sent her to a school in a village, and when she war old enuff, I asked her what she'd do—stay thar by herself, or go with me. See thout that much of me that she wouldn't leave me, and hyar she is."

"But where do you live?" said Aubrey.

"I'll show you to-morrow. It's a place that few could find, and when they found it, they'd be mighty keetful how they went into it. We pass it on our way to-morrow, when we go through the pass. Since I've had Stell, I've staid at home most of the time, for I wouldn't leave her, even for a day, not if I could help it. I told her to stay in the cave, but she disobeyed me this once."

"You know I am not afraid, father," said the girl. "Black-birds never come thar to chase me, for there is not a horse upon these plains can catch me. Flying in a fair chase. I never was hurt before in my life."

"I hope your father has not give you great pain, Miss Stella," said Aubrey. "It is partly my fault that you were hurt at all, and I should be sorry if my awkward surgery gave you great pain."

"You are not awkward," replied Stella. "Your touch is as gentle as a woman's, and you have dressed my wound in a



masterly manner. I believe my father is not so very sorry I am hurt, for it gives him a chance to pet me, and he knows I like that."

"Little gal," said the guide, fondly, laying his broad hand on her flowing hair and touching it caressingly, "you hadn't orter say I don't keer because you ar' hurt. I'd be right sorry to believe that."

"But this is a strange life for a young girl," said Aubrey, doubtfully.

"I know it," replied Stella, "but I like it dearly. There is a romance about it, a wild freedom, which I could not have in cities. When I am tired of wandering about in my strange cave and finding out new beauties in it, I mount my horse and take a dash over the prairie. If I meet Indians, I am off like the wind to my cave, and defy them to find me out. Oh, it is a wild, wonderful life I lead, as the Spirit of the Hills."

"Are you the Spirit of the Hills?" said Aubrey. "Then you are famous at the forts. The trappers and trappers tell strange stories of your appearances and disappearances, and think you a veritable spirit."

"It is no wonder," she said, laughing. "No doubt I puzzle the poor fellows dreadfully. Yet I have done them some good in my time, and they know it. My father is a trapper, and when I see a chance to save any of them from destruction, I can not be backward, even at a little personal risk. Father, I wonder what has become of Ben?"

"Who is Ben?" said Aubrey, looking a little troubled.

"Ben! The dearest fellow you ever saw. He has been by my side in danger's hour, and would peril his life to save mine. No one, not even my father, is more faithful to me than Ben."

"Some trapper, I suppose?" said Aubrey.

"My father's companion when he is not with me. He left me this morning to go in search of my father, not knowing that he went in the canoe. While he was gone I rode away, and doubtless he is searching for me everywhere. I am concerned about him, and hope he has fallen into no bad company, or been hurt. I am sure no one loves me better than Ben."

"Now, Stell—" began the trapper.



"Now, father, I am sure no one loves me better than Ben, and I quite dote upon him. He is handsome, too."

"Don't be mischievous, little 'un," said Buckskin Bill. "It's her dog, gentlemen; I forgot to speak of him. She has never been out without him afore, and I don't know where he is."

At this moment a deep, resonant bay sounded upon the plain outside the camp. Buckskin Bill put his fingers to his mouth and whistled. A moment after, a dark body shot over the head of the Yankee, who crouched low in surprise, and put his hand upon a weapon. The new-comer was a beautiful hound, of mixed breed, with the chest and shoulders of a lion. He fawned upon Stella, and received her caress as his due, went to Buckskin Bill and put his tawny muzzle against his face, and then came back to lie at Stella's feet, blinking at them with fiery eyes.

"Thunderation!" said the Yankee. "Ain't he a beauty, though?"

It was a beautiful hound, and one that would have made a bad enemy to encounter. Standing nearly three feet high, with muscular flanks and strong jaws, he could have dragged down a buffalo bull with perfect ease. One or two of the greenhorns edged away from the dangerous vicinity, evidently in doubt whether the new-comer was a safe pet. But, when they saw him lay his huge head upon Stella's hand, they knew that there was nothing to be apprehended from him.

"Don't know how it is, boys," said Buckskin Bill, "but that dog is the strangest critter you ever see. A musical genius, he is. He will sing like an angel, you bet."

"That's tew much, yow know," said the Yankee. "I've lots of learned dogs afore now, but I never found one yit that could *sing*."

"Sater doubt my words, don't ye?" said Bill, in high scorn. "Now what moost your name be, mister?"

"Well, when I'm tew hum, they spell my name Josh—Josh—Perkins—P-e-r-k-i-n-s. Out here they say it short, and call me Yankee Josh. But that ain't it. I ain't got no call to believe any dog can sing."

"All right. Now I reckon it won't be hard to prove it, mister. Stella, you ain't got your guitar, hev you?"



"I've got my flute," said Stella.

"That'll do, I reckon. Play something lively, then. I'm goin' to show ye first that he kin dance, and then that he kin sing. Try 'Saint Patrick's Day in the Mornin'." Stella.

The girl produced the pieces of a flute from the pocket of her dress, and then looked at her father in despair. She could not use her right arm.

"Now blame my cats if I didn't forget that," he said. "Wal, give me the flute. I ain't much of a player compared with Stell, but I'll do my best."

He must have had a wonderful idea of Stella's musical powers, if she was a better player than he was, for he handled the flute like a master. Every note came out round and full, and an Irishman who had been dozing over the fire, started as if from a dream, for the flute almost seemed to speak the words:

"Have you seen my man, my man, my man,

Have you seen my man, looking for me?

He wears a blue jacket, a pair of white trousers,

A hole in his coat, he is blind of one eye."

Starting up with a Tipperary yell, he broke into a fantastic jig, accompanying the music, and commenting something in this style:

"Are we all from west of Athlone, ye civils? Hopt and toe, b'ys. Cut an' come agin. Whoa! The devil fly away wid ye all, and God bless St. Patrick, that banished the bugs and toads!"

The Irishman was not alone in his wild dance. At the first note of the flute the band picked up his cue, and moved uneasily in his place. All at once he sprang to his feet and commenced a wild dance, if dance it might be called, lifting one foot after another, bounding upright, and keeping the most perfect time. The whole camp was in a roar. Even in the presence of danger, nothing can keep down the exuberant spirits of the free trapper. They laughed loud and long at the grotesque attitudes of man and dog, and shouted encouragingly to them:

"Keep it up, Tim. Never say die. Hurray! That's the ticket. Who cares for a cent. For the credit of your country, don't stop for any dog. Don't let him beat ye, Tim. Go



it, dorg. That's the best purp I ever seen in my born days, an' he's worth his weight in beaver pelts. I'll give that fur him. Hi, hi!"

Every trapper was on his feet, shouting varied notes of encouragement, and Bal played on until he was fairly black in the face. But all things must have an end, and his wind went at last in an expiring squeak.

"Tarr, I cove," he gasped. "Now, d'ye say he kain't dance?"

"Dida't say he couldn't dance," roared Josh. "Said he couldn't sing, and no more he can't."

"Can't, eh? We'll try that. Stella, would you mind giving the boys a song?"

"Not in the least," said Stella.

"Something lively first," said Bill.

Without speaking of a cold, or any of the petty excuses young ladies use when they wish to be teased to sing, the girl struck up a beautiful song, then much in vogue. The dog was lying at her feet again, and as she sang, looked up in her face, but lay quiet. She had a wonderful voice, and Aubrey, who was himself a fine amateur musician, applauded warmly. He had heard all the cantatrices of the day, and he felt that, with training, she could equal them at least. The men applauded vociferously, and the Yankee laughed loud and long.

"I guess that will satisfy you, Mr. Backskin Bill," he said. "Now don't try to fool men like us. Sing! He kain't sing. That ain't no living dog kan sing."

"Kain't, eh?"

"Of course not."

"Perhaps you'll be willing to risk something on that ar'."

"Well, I'm always ready for a trade that ar' way," said Josh. "What'll yew bet?"

"But for the best pair of beaver pelts I've got to home, ag'in' that knife of your'n."

"I'll dew it," said Josh.

"I've got the right to try two songs on him, ain't I?" said Bill.

"Try jst ez many as you darn please. The dog can't sing."

"Wal, ef he don't I lose the pelts, I judge. Now, Stell,



sing the boys another song like the one you sung jest now."

Stella obeyed promptly, and the dog still lay at her feet blinking sleepily, apparently enjoying the music, but not in any way showing a desire to "sing." Bill looked crest-fallen, and Josh again laughed.

"Pshaw. I know'd I was robbing you," said he. "Come, do you want to double the bet?"

"I'll make suthin' or go bu'sted," growled the other, angrily. "Yes, I'll bet two more beaver-pelts that the dog sings this time."

"What ag'in?" said Josh.

"That belt of your'n."

"Don't think I can make a couple of beaver-pelts easier," said Josh. "I'll bet yew."

"All right," said Bill. "I forgot to tell you he were a Methodist dog, and won't sing nothin' but Methodist hymes. Try him with 'Come ye disconsolate,' Stoll."

The moment Stella began to sing that well-known camp-meeting hymn, the dog raised his head, and joined in with the most dolorous howl which ever issued from the mouth of any animal. He seemed to tune his pipes by the rising or falling of the notes. When her voice sunk, so did his; when she struck a high note, he howled frantically, making the prairie ring. The lurking Indians doubtless thought pan-tomonia had broken loose in the camp, for they suddenly broke into a series of wild yells, at which the guards grasped their weapons, expecting an assault, but no assault came. Stella sung on, accompanied by the dog, while the trappers were so weakened by laughter, that an assault at that moment would have found them utterly helpless. When she ceased, the dog, with a deep sigh of relief, dropped his head.

Josh looked steadily at the brute for a moment, shook his head slowly, and lifting the knife and belt which lay at his feet, passed them to the guide, saying, simply:

"Take 'em, Bill."

Bill had reached out his hand for the knife, when he suddenly paused with extended arm, and his eyes fixed upon the river in front. A hush fell upon the camp.



## CHAPTER VII.

## "SLEEPY JOE'S" NAP.

WHAT had drawn the attention of the guide, in the moment of his triumph?

Every eye followed the direction of his gaze, but could see nothing. "Sit down, every man," he whispered. "And don't mind me nor follow me. I smell woolen."

He stood irresolute for a moment, and then walked slowly away from the fire, vanishing in the darkness. Unperceived by any one, he had made a signal to the dog, for the animal rose, shook himself like a lion aroused from his lair, and then followed silently in the footsteps of his master. Five minutes of fearful suspense followed, and then came a sudden yell of mingled terror and surprise from the rushes upon the river-bank, and the sound of a confused struggle. The guide's voice was heard, rising above the din, shouting words of encouragement to the dog, while he himself seemed to be engaged in a fearful struggle. Snatching up a blazing brand in one hand, and drawing a pistol with the other, the young captain ran down to the scene of conflict, followed by three or four of the more daring spirits, and found the guide engaged in a desperate grapple with an Indian in his war-paint. The two were rolling over and over upon the hard soil, panting for breath, while the hound stood over a prostrate savage, whose breath had fled at one grip of those powerful jaws. They seized the Indian fighting with Backskin Bill and dragged him to his feet, and revealed the face of Blackbird, wild with the ardor of battle.

"Dogs of white men," he hissed. "Blackbird, son of Rolling Thunder, laughs you to scorn. You are children. A Blackfoot girl would laugh at such warriors as you."

"Secure him," replied Aubrey, quietly. "We will keep him as a hostage for the good conduct of his men. Bring him out into the light and let us see him."

"Beware how you degrade me with bonds, white dog that



you are. Blackbird will eat your heart. He will dance at a stake when the flames are rising about it and you cry out in pain like a little child. Why do you not take a hatchet and drive it into my heart, that I may not dance at your death-fire?"

"Never mind him," said Buckskin Bill. "The red chief wants us to kill him. Tie him as tight as you can."

The Indian, seeing that he could not escape the Indians, submitted with the natural stoicism of his race. Straps of buckskin were drawn tightly at his ankles and knees and his hands secured behind him. Bound in this way, he could not move hand or foot and could only lie prostrate upon the earth.

"I seen his eyes shine in the dark," said Bill. "That's what made me go for him. Come away, Ben. That Indian's troubles is over. He won't stand no more horses. Blackbird, I'd like to ask you one question. Did you ketch that chap they call the White Demon?"

"Blackbird will not speak," said the Indian, sullenly.

"I know how it is," said Bill, speaking to Chiton. "The Blackbird are all as 'fraid as death of this White Demon, and would ez soon lose their scalps ez to come within reach of his hands."

"The white napper I es," cried the Indian. "Blackbird does not fear the White Demon. He runs like a deer. Is Blackbird to be blamed because the White Demon has longer legs than he has, and can run faster?"

"It's all right," said Bill. "I thought I could get it out of him. They didn't ketch the White Demon. Terrible story, Blackbird, and keep just ez cool ez you kin. 'T don't no use to get outwaded, you know, because we've got you fast. I got to say that your chaps had better know that you are a prisoner, and they will be sorry of us."

"Pshaw!" cried Blackbird. "I will kill you."

"Not if I know it," said Bill, coolly. "You make a mistake to get up, and you won't kill nobody. Dead men never do; they ain't on it, so to speak."

Blackbird remained silent, and Bill went down to the river-side and shouted in the Indian tongue the information that Blackbird was a prisoner, and would be shot if they made



an assault. There was no reply to this for some moments, but in that mysterious way which only Indians know, the news was passed from mouth to mouth, and directly after a glow word of disappointment was heard all about the camp.

"The damned thieves were gathering for a rush," said Bill. "I guess we've backed their little game now. They don't dare to strike at us while their chief is in danger. We may as well take a snooze—them that needs it. I'll keep watch of our friend Blackbird for two or three hours, and when I get tired I kin call up one of the boys. But first I must find a place for my little gal to sleep."

"Never mind me, father," said Stella. "I can sleep anywhere."

"You go on. Your arm pains you now, I kin see it in your face, though you won't tell of it if you was under an' git a lot of torment, you little rascal. You'd be better asleep, and I know it."

He went round among the packs, rummaged a number of blankets and blankets belonging to the men on duty, and made a soft couch for Stella at the foot of a tree. Then he lay back and composed, she was soon sleeping the sleep of innocence, with her head leaning on her left arm, and the right, wrapped in the scarf, lying across her bosom. Blackbird sat down at the foot of the tree, between Stella and the captive Indian, and lighting a pipe, he let his eyes wander across his hands and began his lonely watch. It was a strange scene, such as can only be found in the great North-West. The sleeping man, the watch-fire, the hammock in front, and the wild figure of the guide, formed a picture worthy the pencil of an artist. The hours were slowly on, and still the guide sat smoking at the foot of the tree, pausing every time to knock the ashes from his pipe to look at the recumbent figure of his captive, but always leaving that lovely picture quietly to look at the placid face of his sleeping child. A great, heavy, thunderous sound beat under that black sapling, and a great wind which had in it the spirit of true calamity. The little girl's sleep had become very deep, and she stirred not any more. The Indian had become quite too quiet for his own good. When I have no feeling about



a white camp and give no sign of their presence, it means mischief.

"They kain't do any thing ez long ez I kin keep Blackbird in reach of my hand," he muttered. "But ef he was to git away, look out for squalls. I guess I'll wake up one of the boys and take a snooze myself. This has been a lusy day for me—powerful busy, all on account of the cussed Black-feet."

He touched the nearest trapper on the shoulder, and he awoke grumbling, and picked up his rifle with a sally air.

"You couldn't have picked out no one else ef you tried," grumbled the man. "I'm dead beat out, and ef you was worth a cent you'd know it too. Thar, that's enuff; lay down and snore, darn you."

Bill paid no attention to his growling, knowing that any man in the camp would have considered himself aggrieved if he had been chosen to watch, but, taking the grumbler's blanket, he rolled himself up in it, and was asleep almost as soon as his body touched the earth.

These hardy border-men can sleep anywhere, even upon a blood-stained field of battle. As the chosen guard had said, Bill was snoring in less than five minutes, his head upon a rest. There was nothing left for it but to take his position, light a pipe and watch. Buckskin Bill had made an unfortunate selection, not knowing the man personally. He was a perfect Rip Van Winkle in the matter of sleep, and when once he had laid down, it was impossible for him to keep awake until he had his nap out. Blackbird, who was sleeping with one eye open, saw that he had a drowsy guard, and became instantly on the alert, watching for a chance to escape. The guard nodded drowsily, and his pipe fell from his mouth.

The chief now began to roll himself slowly away from the fire, with his eye upon the guard. The knife which Yankee Josh had offered the guide lay neglected upon the earth, not three feet away, and his aim was to get possession of it. It is impossible to describe the snake-like caution with which the wily chief proceeded, rolling a little way, and then lying in the same position, with head slightly raised. At last, by imperceptible degrees, he reached the place where the knife lay. It



was still in its sheath, and how was he to draw it? The Indian was fertile in invention, and rolling over on his face, he seized the handle in his mouth and drew the bright weapon from its sheath, and again lay down on his back, holding the knife firmly.

How was he to use it? His hands were tied behind his back or he could have quickly severed the bonds upon his lower limbs. Hesitating for a moment and seeing that the camp was still quiet, he managed to sit erect, and turning his head dropped the knife over his shoulder. Groping for it with his bound hands, he contrived to seize it and get the point upward between his palms. Working it up and down, and cutting his hands severely in the act, he succeeded in insinuating the point into the knot of the buckskin thong upon his hands, and bore down upon it. The buckskin parted, and the hands of the savage were free.

A lusty man would have leaped up at once and escaped. Not so with the wily Blackfoot, who was far too sagacious for that. He simply rolled himself back to his old position, and lay there, with his hands still under him, still holding the knife. At this moment the guard, losing his balance as he slept, bumped his head against the tree and awoke with a start. Angry at himself for falling asleep, he started up and came to look at his prisoner. He saw nothing wrong, and did not know of the knife which the savage held in his hand, and which he would have buried to the hilt in the breast of the guard if he had stooped down. But, seeing the bonds upon his legs all right, he took it for granted that the hands were in the same condition, and went back to his place and lighted another pipe. With sublime patience the Indian lay until the sleepy fit came upon the guard again, and the pipe dropped from his mouth, and, leaning his head against the tree, he slept as soundly as any one of the others. Then the Indian bent forward and severed the bonds which confined his legs.

Even now he did not attempt to rise, for the ligatures had for a moment deprived his limbs of their strength. He waited until the blood was coursing with its old vigor through his veins, and then began to creep away from the fire, keeping his eyes upon the sleeping guard. To get out of the camp, he must either take his way over the barricades, at which he knew



guards were posted who would not sleep, or else take to the river. But, directly in the path he must take to reach the river, lay two enemies. The nearest one was Buckskin Bill, wrapped in his blanket, and the next was the dog, who lay near the bank of the stream, with his head upon his paws, fast asleep. Buckskin had a wholesome dread of the dog, whose prowess he had seen exemplified in the death of his companion, a few hours before, and the Indian knew that he was no match for the wary brute unless he could kill him at the first blow.

But the immediate danger was, that Buckskin Bill would wake, and, from his experience of his strength, the Indian had no desire to try his prowess that night. There was only one way—from the place where Bill lay to the river was barely twenty feet, and he could clear it in two leaps. Gathering himself, he flew into the air like a ball, and landed close to the side of the dog, who leaped up with a roar like a lion, and made a savage snap at the body which flew over him and landed in the river with a loud splash. The next moment he struck the water he sank from view, and the balled ball rolled up and down the bank mad for his blood.

Wild confusion reigned in the camp. The sleepers started up and looked for their prisoner, and found only the severed ligatures upon the grass. The knife he had taken with him. With a roar of disappointment, Buckskin Bill raised his hand and dealt "Sleepy Joe"—the nickname of the unlucky guard—a blow which raised him from the ground and sent him flying backward, striking the ground with a loud thump.

"Take that, you low-lived, sneaking, sleepy son of a fool!" roared the irate scout. "You pizon-stupid, unfortunate yuks! It would save you right if I was to raise your hair this blessed minnit, and I'd do it for half a dime!"

The men who had been wakened questioned him, but Buckskin Bill was too angry to make much reply.

"Don't ask me, none of you. If we had kept Buckskin with us, we must have marched through the middle of the Blackfoot country, and not a man would have dared to stop. As it is now, it will be fight, worry and worry night and day. Thar, git your guns, every man. Life or not, we'd have a dash at us ez soon ez they find out that Buckskin hez escaped."



Let me get at that Sleepy Joe. I'd like to beat him right in the snoot."

"If you would allow me to hazard an opinion, I should say you had done that already," said Clinton, laughing. "Come, Bill; it's no use to cry for spilled milk, as the saying is, though I will put no faith in that man from this day. No sleeper in my camp. Hark!"

A long, low, tremulous cry arose on the night-air, coming from the bank of the river, perhaps two hundred yards below the camp. It was immediately answered from every side, and then a wild chorus of exultant cries told that the savages understood that their chief had escaped.

Bill looked duggers at the somnolent trapper and made an advance in his direction, but Sleepy Joe interposed himself behind Aubrey.

"Now, don't let him tech me, cap'n," he whined. "It must happen to any man."

"Didn't you go to sleep?" roared the wrathful guide.

"Must be I did; what of that? If you'd a-know'd pretty, you would have picked out some 'un else, you would. I kin't keep awake when I'm waked up afore my nap is out."

"Come, now, Sleepy Joe," said Stella, who was wide awake now. "Don't you shame, father."

"Tain't no such thing. Constitutional! It's the most constitutional thing I ever heard of in my life. Oh, blame my eyes if it ain't enough to make a man rise right up and howl."

"Enough of that," said Aubrey, resuming the air of the captain. "You are responsible in selecting this man, who is a good enough fellow, except from his habitual propensity for sleeping. I do not wish they had attempted to catch us this morning, for I am sure we are none of us on the watch. Sleep, P. M. D., P. M. D., and P. M. D., remain awake and vigilant, the points. The rest of you may be down again. I will not rest any more to-night."



## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE STRANGER.

MORNING came, and no attack. Blackbird was too *old* a "bird" to make an assault upon a camp where every one was on his guard, ready and waiting for an attack. When morning broke, not an Indian was to be seen. The horses were saddled, the pack-horses received their loads, and the whole cavalcade started. Looking over the plains, nothing could be seen of the savage band which had that morning assailed them, but Buckskin Bill knew only too well that they had not given up their design of attack, and that Blackbird would harass them to the very confines of their territory, and even into the country beyond. They were now approaching a section full of danger, for the passes of the mountain showed in front, and from the numberless by-ways which led into the main path from every side, a lurking foe could pour his arrows into their ranks. But the volatile trappers had already recovered from their fright, and were "larking" with one another, and playing tricks upon Irish Pat and Bordeaux, the Frenchmen. One of them had stolen the Frenchman's hat, and insisted upon it that Pat had eaten it.

"You see, it looked like a big potato," said Bill, "and Pat likes potatoes. 'Twa'n't a decent kind of hat for any one to kerry on his head, nuther. I'm glad it's gone."

"Le bon chapeau! Ah, ciel, monsieur Bille, vat you say? Zat ze Irisher eat him. Be gar, he lay hard on he stomach; he all grease."

"Irisher yerself, ye parlevoo!" yelled Pat. "Don't ye spake a word till me now, or I'll bite the head av ye."

"That ain't fair," said Buckskin Bill. "You eat a man's cup and then want to lick him because he don't like it. That ain't what I call a fair shake, nohow. What's the matter with Ben, Stoll? Looks ez ef he smelt a Blackfoot."

The dog was growling fiercely, and the bristles upon his back stood up like spikes. He was looking in the direction of



a clump of bushes which lay in the path. Bill called the band to a halt, and pointing with his hand, sent the dog forward, and followed as fast as his horse could go. When he reached the bushes he gave a shout and beckoned to his companions to come on.

The band spurred forward and reached the bushes, to find the Blackskin guide bending over in the saddle, looking down upon the dead body of a Blackfoot brave, who lay upon his back, looking as calm and placid as if asleep. Over him stood the dog, with erected bristles, not offering to touch the body.

"Did the dog kill him?" said Aubrey. "It was quickly done."

"The dog didn't tech him," replied Bill. "He was dead a long time, and Ben will never tech a dead body."

"Who killed him? I see no mark of violence."

"The White Demon has been at work," said Bill. "It's a curious thing, but when he kills a Blackfoot outright and leaves him on the plain, he don't leave any marks upon him. I'm glad the White Demon is on the trail, for he won't do us any harm, and he won't hurt the Blackfeet and scare them away."

"What shall we do with the Indian?" said Aubrey.

"Let him lie where he is. Blackbird will find him and give him burial. I'd like to know something more about the White Demon, but I don't know how to work it out. Ride on. Come to heel, Ben."

The dog left the body of the Indian, and took his old place beside the trapper's horse, and they rode on over the plain toward the mountains. The ground was gradually rising into foot-hills, and the sage-bushes began to show thicker. At the suggestion of Backskin Bill, the captain sent out six picked men to beat the bushes upon both sides of the path, and see that no foe lurked in their depths. They had not ridden a hundred yards, when a warning cry was heard, and the whole body spurred on, to find the vailletes parleying with a single man, who had dismounted, laid his rifle across his saddle, and was warning them back.

"Don't be a fool," shouted one of the men. "Don't ye see we ar' humans?"

The man was not to be blamed if he had grave doubts in



regard to this fact, for the free trapper is much given to bedizenning his carcass after the Indian fashion. The sun and wind tans their faces to nearly the same hue as their copper-colored enemies, and they wear the fringed leggings and moccasins worn by the Blackfeet. In addition to this, their hats are adorned by fluttering knots of ribbon of various tints, and, at a little distance, it is next to impossible to tell a party of trappers from savages.

"Who are you?" demanded the single man, still menacing them with the rifle. "Speak, and do not be over-tellious in your answer, for I am rather quick-tempered, and might fire."

"You need have no fear," said Clinton Aubrey, riding forward. "We are white men on our way to Oregon."

The man unlocked his rifle and sprung into the saddle, coolly awaiting their approach. He was a man of large frame, with powerfully-developed muscles, armed in hunter fashion, and dressed in the same style.

"May I ask who you are?" said Aubrey. "It is not often we meet lonely white men in these hills."

"Nevertheless you see me here," said the other, quietly. "My name is Garrett, though I do not see of what use it can be to you. With your permission I will ride with you, as you seem to be going my way."

"We shall be glad of your company, for you look like a man who is accustomed to Indian wiles. Have you seen any Blackfeet this morning?"

"Yes. A party of nearly a hundred passed me, when I lay hidden in the sage-brush half an hour ago."

"Did you know them?"

"Yes. It was the band of Blackbird."

"Then you know the rascal too?"

"Yes, who have ever lived in this country, do not know the vile wretch. Do you propose to ride directly into his trap?"

"Not if we know it," said Bill.

The new-comer looked at the speaker with a strange smile.

"I have heard of you, too, my man," he said. "You have made a good reputation on the border, old true-blue. No, I don't think you are likely to run into a trap, but it don't hurt



to know where the danger lies. If you go up the main pass into the hills, you will be assailed in its narrowest part, and shot down before you have a chance to save yourselves. Don't you think we had better try Brown's Cañon?"

"You bet," said Bill. "Stranger, where would I hev met you afore?"

"You might have met me in a number of places," replied the stranger.

"Yas; I know I *might*. But where *did* I meet you?"

"Impossible to say. Let us ride on, for Blackbird may send forward spies to see that we enter the pass. Let us try a little strategy. Send the six men in advance, who met me just now, and let them go part way up the pass. The Indian spies will fall back before them, and when they get out of sight, let the men make for Brown's Cañon as fast as they can go. We will be through the pass and in their rear before they know it!"

"A good plan," said the captain. "What do you think, Bill?"

"That's the way to do it," replied Bill.

Aubrey gave the order, and the six men pushed off in advance, while the rest of the party, after following them a little way, turned off into the tangled sage-bush to the right, guided by the trapper and Garrett, who seemed to take the lead as his right. For over half a mile they broke through a rough and difficult path, Clinton Aubrey taking charge of Stella, and finding in the end that she was more of an adept in managing the bewitched horse she rode, than he was in such a path as this. At length they came to the mouth of a pass so dark and narrow, that some of the men muttered that it looked like going into a grave. But into this gloomy pass Garrett and Blackbird led plunged, closely followed by the others, walking their horses at the order of the guides, so as to awaken no echoes upon the hard path.

"There is no telling how far a Blackfoot can hear a horse's foot," said Bill, "because they are such natural born thieves that they can smell a horse a mile off. Single file now. **Thar ain't room for any thing else.**"

The pass was a strange one, a sort of cleft in the rocky hill, just wide enough for the party to pass through one at a



time. They pursued their course for a mile, when they were joined by the men who had been sent into the other pass, who reported that they had obeyed orders, proceeding to a certain point, and then returning, after satisfying themselves that the Indians were in front of them. All at once the cañon ended, as abruptly as it began, and then they emerged into the larger pass, in the rear of the savage band, waiting for them below.

"I am determined not to suffer these Indians to dog us longer, without feeling that we can strike," said Aubrey. "Is there any way to get at them?"

"It is easy enough, if you have the will to do it," replied Garrett.

"Try us," said Aubrey, sternly. "I do not think you will find us wanting."

"Put the lady in charge of a man or two and leave her here," said Garrett. "And then follow me. Doubtless, as they do not expect us, we can steal upon them unawares, and cut them down. Curse the Blackfeet, let them die."

"You hate Blackfeet then?" said Aubrey, looking at him.

"*Perhaps*," said the man, quickly. "If you had seen what I have of the cruelty of the Blackfeet, you would not wonder that I hate them, and would like to see them cut off from the face of the earth."

"You need have no man with me," said Stella. "Ben is as good a guardian as I want, and then I have my rifle."

"Let one of the men stay, Stella," said the guide.

"No; if you mean to attack this band, ride on, and God be with you."

They led their horses silently down the pass, leaving Stella sitting in the saddle, and the dog crouching at her feet. The pass widened as they proceeded, and in a few moments they were called to a halt by Garrett.

"I will go forward and reconnoiter," he whispered. "Wait for me."

He hurried away, and for five minutes they stood beside their horses. Then, silent as a creeping ghost, the men came back, and taking his bridle from the hand of Buckskin Bill, who had been holding his horse, raised his hand, and the men formed in fours, as the pass was wide enough to permit it, and rode on.



slowly. The Indians were grouped together in a little opening, waiting for the signal of their spies, who had gone out again when it was found that the white violettes had fallen back, and were not looking behind them, until the appalling battle-shout of the trappers rung out upon the clear air of the morning, and they burst in upon them wild with the ardor of battle, pouring in one deadly volley before they charged with knife and hatchet. Four of the enemy dropped, while others were desperately wounded. Blackbird saw his danger and shouted an order to the men. Obedient to his word they slipped out of the saddle, and dashed up the steep sides of the pass, from which secure elevation they commenced a galling fire of arrows upon the exposed trappers. Though not a very dangerous weapon at long range, the arrow is a fearfully embarrassing one for cavalry, and the horses of the trappers reared and plunged with long arrows sticking in their sides.

"Fall back!" shouted the captain. "Reload your pieces."

This was precisely what Blackbird wanted. Thirty or forty of the men slipped down, and each secured two horses, with which they vanished down the pass at a headlong gallop, as they had not dared to do while the trappers were close upon their heels. The remainder set up wild yells of execration, and vanished over the ridge.

"Shall we pursue them?" said the captain.

"No such fools," said Bill. "Git into an ambush."

"I hate to see them escape," growled Garrett. "However, it is useless to pursue, but we turned the tables on them nicely. How Blackbird stared when he saw us come bursting from the pass, in their rear. It was a hot little skirmish while it lasted. Have you got a sharp knife, Buckskin Bill?"

"That's one," said Bill. "What do you want with it?"

"I've got an arrow in the hand," replied Garrett, "and it does not feel very well, I assure you."

"Let me attend to it," said the captain. "I am a surgeon."

He produced a case of instruments from his saddlebags, and removed the arrowhead from the hand of their new ally. When this was done, he went round among the party, cutting the annoying weapons from the flesh of the horses. When



this was done they turned back, and felt that they had won the land of Blackbird a lesson. Riding on at a lively pace, they were startled by the crack of a rifle in front, and a hoarse bay from the dog.

"I forgot," cried Bill. "Get out of the way, Ben!"

Followed by Clinton and Garrett, the party crept up the pass to the place where they had left Stella. As the pass opened they saw her, and Buckskin Bill drew forth with an oath of rage. One Indian lay writhing on the sand, another was struggling in the grip of the dog, and a third was dragging Stella from the saddle, in spite of her struggles. The three had struggled up the pass and were at the place where Brown's Cañon debouched into the larger pass, when the party entered it, and seeing the girl alone, on which Stella rushed forward to rescue her. Stella was not the girl who had danced to her fate, and in raising her little rifle in spite of her wounded arm, she shot the Frenchman through the shoulder, while Ben pinned a second, who was already falling heavily in his grasp. The Indian who was struggling with Stella heard the thunder of coming hoofs, and looking over his shoulder, saw the fierce figure of Buckskin Bill close at hand, waving a hatchet over his head. With a shriek of dismay the man released his hold and sprang up the rocky side of the cañon, struggling for life. Garrett raised his weapon, but the hard riding had shaken off the cap, and the Indian reached the summit and disappeared.

"Cursed foolishness," roared Bill. "You won't be left alone ag'in, you infant. I ain't going to leave you in danger."

"You came in time, dear father," said Stella. "Be thankful for that, and save that poor Indian from Ben."

They forced the hound away and looked at the Blackbird. He was badly bitten, but might live. The man who had been shot by Stella was howling at the top of his voice, and evidently expecting his death. The party gathered up, looked at the two wounded Indians, and then turned homeward. At last, nearly all; but two of the blackbirds were left, for what purpose Stella never knew.



## CHAPTER IX.

## THE SECRETS OF THE CAVE.

THE scenery now became grand. Huge rocks were piled high upon either side, mossy and gray, as they had lain for years. Spike upon spike they rose, the one above the other, and high above their feebler sisters, the snow-capped summits of the Rocky Mountains rose against the summer sky. Their Indian warriors had vanished like a dream, and no savage yell disturbed the wild beauty of the scene.

"You wish to see where I live?" said Stella. "It is a very fine hiding-place, and as I do not wish that all should know the secret of my hiding-place, no one shall go with me except my father and you, Captain Aubrey."

The men looked glancing at this decision, and she saw it.

"You wish to go, too?" she said. "Well, my house is a large one, and I will hold you all, no doubt. Come, then; but some must stay to guard the house."

"Is there no place to hide them among these rocks?" said Aubrey. "I do not wish to risk a halt, if it will bring any danger to the men."

"Can you find a hiding place?" said Stella, turning to her father, with a laugh. "Let us try. Every man dismount, lead his horse and follow me."

The path led them up a narrow file until they were moving along a ledge forty or fifty feet above the path they had just left. Stella stopped and taking out a small bar which was concealed in a crevice, she struck upon a heavy stone in the face of a perpendicular wall upon the right hand. The blow was no more heard than the rock was heard to strike, but that it was, in fact, a door of heavy wood, painted so as to resemble the rock, and which she had fastened over from the outside. The men, some hardly breathing, led their horses into a great room, whose floor was covered with a thick carpet of varied shrubs and ferns. The room was perhaps two hundred feet in length and twenty, and rose a hundred feet above them. Stella



closed the door and then took candles from a crevice in the wall, lighted a match and set up the tapers where they would give the trappers light enough to attend to their horses. Then, taking a third candle in her hand, she led the way through a long, vaulted passage into another room, which was so greatly beautiful that every one uttered an exclamation of astonishment and delight. The roof above them, under the light of the taper, glowed and sparkled like the "Star Chamber" in "Mammoth Cave." The floor was smooth and even as if carved in marble, and that of remarkable purity. Long lines of columns stretched down both sides of the room and through the center, where the stalactites and stalagmites had met and joined in one. This was Stella Ray's home.

"What do you think of my palace?" she said, laughingly.

"I think that the palace is worthy of the princess," replied the captain, gallantly, "and that is saying a great deal for the palace."

"How we flatter," said Stella. "You should see the princess sitting in state with all her subjects round her. They do not number many—one man and a dog, yet I think few monarchs can count all their subjects faithful."

"You do not mean to leave us out?" said the captain, reproachfully. "You have no subjects more faithful than your new ones."

"Find seats, every one," said Stella, "while I illuminate the palace. You have no idea of the effect of a number of lights in this place. It is almost like fairy-land, and its wonders never cease. When I am tired of sitting alone in this place, I take Ben and explore the cave, which stretches away in various passages for miles. I have heard of wonderful caves in Kentucky. They may be larger than this, but not more beautiful."

"I should think you would be afraid of getting lost in the passages," said Clinton.

"I take care of that. I never move without plenty of tapers, matches and a piece of chalk. As I go on I chalk a broad arrow or hand upon the wall, pointing toward this room. Then it is impossible for me to lose my way."

"But are there not dangerous places in the cave, where you might fall and never be heard of more?"



"Yes. But I need not fall into them. Come, if you would like to explore this cave, I will lead you."

Only three or four of the trappers, besides Clinton Aubrey and Blackskin Bill, consented to accompany them. But after they had been gone for a moment, Garrett rose and said he would follow them. Taking a taper from a pile upon a little ledge, he lighted it at the fire which one of the men was building, and followed in the track of the exploring party, who were moving on through the long passages, now creeping on their hands and knees, now going forward stooping, until they came out into a second room, larger than the first, and which was fully as wonderful. The limestone had frescoed the ceiling in various fantastic shapes, and on the sides had run down in waving folds, giving it the appearance of tapestry. In one corner, the appearance of a royal couch arose, so perfect in shape that Clinton, looking between the drooping curtains, almost expected to see a sleeping form upon the pure white limestone.

"Is it not beautiful?" said the girl.

"It seems like a dream, or the realization of one of our old Persian or Arabian tales," replied Aubrey. "I never saw its equal in my life. That is the most splendid stone imitation of tapestry I ever heard of."

"I will show you other things as grand. There—what do you think of that?"

She turned and held up her torch, and there, sitting upright against the wall of the room, he saw two giant figures, draped in robes of snow-white beauty. One of the men who had followed them uttered a cry of terror, for he thought he saw spirits.

"The geni of this place," said Stella. "There they sit, as they have sat for ages."

It was nothing, upon closer inspection, but a pair of monstrous stalagmites, rising about eight feet from the floor. Yet the stone had run into such strange shapes as to give them the appearance of a pair of sitting figures. They passed on, leaving these snow-white giants on their thrones, and came into another room, on the threshold of which Stella paused and held up her hand.

"Be careful how you enter here, and be sure of your foot-



ing. Father, take hold of my dress. Captain Aubrey, take hold of his hunting-shirt and the others do the same. This is a dangerous place."

She held up her torch and advanced slowly with the rest, clinging to each other, and powerless in the darkness. followed her in single file, each holding the coat of the one before and stepping exactly in his foot-steps. After a few minutes she told them there was no longer any fear, and they relaxed each other. Then, holding the flaming torch above her head, she stepped back and showed them that they had entered a narrow stone path barely four feet wide, on either side of which a dark gulf ran downward ending in utter darkness.

"Ugh!" said Clinton. "It absolutely makes me sick to look into that hole. How could you cross it so boldly?"

"Use makes us bold," she answered. "I have crossed it nearly every day of my life, and am accustomed to it. I could cross it blindfold now."

"You are a daring girl. What is this sound of water?"

"A river," replied Stella.

"A river?"

"Yes. In this subterranean home we have a river and a lake. You shall see."

A hundred yards further on they came to the bank of a dark stream perhaps twenty feet wide, flowing dark and silent through the gloom. High above their heads rose the dark arch of the cavern roof, and at their feet the water flowed slowly by. Clinton stood gazing in silent awe upon the strange scene and wondering for how many years the stream had flowed on, when Stella asked him if he would like a cruise.

"What do you mean?"

"A ride upon this strange river."

"It is Styx. But where is Charon, the ferryman?" asked Aubrey.

"I will be Charon for this cruise. See how my torch lights the water. He spent whole days in his boat, and it was by transporting it to this place that I reached here so long ago, grandfather. Father, stay with the rest upon the bank and let me show Captain Aubrey the mystery of this stream, if you will be so kind."



"I don't like to risk it," said Buckskin Bill. "You mont tip over; ye know you mont, and I don't know whether a man would have the heart to swim in that black water."

"Nonsense," said Stella. "Get in, Captain Aubrey. I will appoint you to carry the torch. I think you had better be down, for a canoe tips easily. Give me the paddle, father."

She pushed off into the midst of that dark stream, and Clinton Aubrey, though he would have been loth to own it, felt a thrill very nearly akin to terror as the light craft floated on. Yet he did not say a word, but held up the torch, while Stella simply kept the canoe steady without passing much, and it floated under a low archway, emerging into a water space which Stella called a lake. It was a place of unknown depth, dark and gloomy, and here the girl rested on her paddle and let him feel the wild grandeur of the scene. Neither spoke for some moments, and then Clinton broke the silence.

"In the presence of such a scene as this, man feels his own weakness and the greatness of his Creator."

"I can feel you and that," replied Stella. "I like to hear men acknowledge his divinity and power. Let us make the circuit of the lake."

Dipping the paddle slowly in the dark water, the canoe floated round the narrow basin and entered the same outlet by which they had come into the place, and they returned to the spot where the others were standing. Leaving the captain on the opposite bank, she brought over the rest, one at a time, and, securing the canoe, took a new taper and led the way again. As they proceeded Clinton became convinced that the light was growing dim or that they were approaching danger. All at once they emerged from a dark passage into a cavern, bowl-like hollow, scooped out by the hand of nature in the overhanging hills. The verdure was seen upon the sides of this strange place and the bottom was soft and verdant.

"The 'Devil's Bowl,'" said Bill.

In the center of this huge drinking-bowl of the giants, some one had erected a cairn or mound of stones, for whatever reason they could not divine. All breathed freely now, for it was a relief, after the close air of the cavern, to breathe the



free air of heaven. Stella sat down upon the cairn, and the others stood in various positions about it. As they looked about them, a solemn voice broke the stillness:

"Beware! The blood-hounds are on your track. The White Demon gives you warning."

Stella sprung up, and, as she did so, there was a brief struggle upon the verge of the bowl, and then an Indian, with hands outstretched as if to save himself from the terrible fall, came flying down from the height, two hundred feet above.

"Fall back into the shadow," whispered Bill. "I hope they ain't found our place."

"It looks like it," said Clinton.

"Let 'em do the'r cursedest. Why, give me half an hour, and I will make that passage in such a shape that the devil could not cross it. We orter been more keerful how we talked. They heard us. I wonder ef that Blackfoot liked the fall?"

"Father, the White Demon is terrible. I fear him dreadfully."

"You needn't. Ef he had any thing ag'in' us, he woudn't have give us warning, you know. You keep dark a moment and I'll take a peep."

The Indian who had fallen lay where he had dropped, lifeless as clay, with his knife and hatchet clutched in his stiffened hand, and his dead eyes staring and wild. However death had come to him, it had been swift and sure.

Creeping with snake-like caution among the bushes, Buckskin Bill was warned of the presence of the Indians, by the sharp twang of a bowstring, and the silent flight of an arrow, which struck the earth within an inch of his ear.

"Back out, boys," muttered Bill. "A hard time comin'. I guess we'll make these devils sick ef they try any games on us."

The arrows now began to drop about him so thickly, that he deemed discretion the better part of valor, and retreated quickly. The Indians were now dancing about on the verge of the bowl, shaking their spears and bows, and evidently anxious to discover whether all the trappers were below or not. Evidently the white men did not intend to let them know this, for not a shot was fired.



"Blackbird is thar," said Bill. "I hearn that melojious voice of his rising like the voice of an eagle. Darn the critter, why didn't I finish him yesterday? Now, mark my words, captain: some of these days you'll find I'm no better than a durned fool."

"What are they trying to do with that stone?" cried the captain.

Several of the savages were rolling a huge stone to the edge of the bowl, pushing with all their strength.

"The devil," shouted Bill. "Git into that hole, every man, before that stone comes down on yer. It'll clean the place from end to end."

The party darted back into the opening to the cavern, and had hardly done so, when the stone came crashing down, breaking a passage for itself through the trees and bushes which grew in the way, and rolling over the very spot where they had lain concealed a few moments before. The Indians, knowing nothing of the entrance to the cave, supposed the men they sought hidden in the valley, and that the stone they had sent down would start them up. After a pause of some moments a yell of disappointment told that they were baffled.

"I could hit that Indian dancing about like a jumpin' jack thar," said one of the men, raising his rifle.

"Don't do it," said Bill. "'Tain't no use to kill 'em off one at a time. Ef we kaint exterminate the hull b'ilin' of 'em to once, we kaint make any thing by shootin' one or two. Come; let's go back."

"And let them descend?"

"Yes. They don't think of the cave, and ef they find it, what use is that to 'em? They must git torches, and then when they git to the river they must swim it, and we'll try to make that lively work for them."

The party went back over the path they had so lately trod, following the broad arrows chalked upon the wall. In a few moments they had crossed the stream, just as the yells of the Indians announced that they had commenced the descent of the "Devil's Bowl."



## CHAPTER X.

## BLACKBIRD AND STELLA.

They hurried back to the stream, and crossed to the other side.

"This is the place to meet them first," said Stella. "Give me the torch. I will go back and warn the men, for they may hear the cries and attempt to reach us. And if they do they will surely be lost in the interminable passages of this cavern, or plunged into some of the deep spaces which we have passed."

She seized the torch, and hurried away, and they waited in breathless anxiety for her coming. Half an hour passed and she did not appear, and the shouts warned them that the Indians had procured lights, and were already on the way. Prostrate behind giant limestone masses, the men waited for the enemy. Then lights began to show in the long corridor, and they were near at hand.

"Get your revolvers ready," said Clinton. "Let no one else fire, and when they reach the brink of the river, let them have the whole six barrels. Nothing can frighten them as that will. You may fire at random."

The Indians came on, looking more hideous in the ghastly light shed by their torches, and reached the river's brink. The first man, not thinking of such a thing, fell with a headlong plunge into the cold, dark water, and scrambled out in a rage, ordering his companions to a halt. They crowded together upon the bank and held up their torches. Just then the revolvers began to crack, and one after another the bullets flew into their crowded ranks.

It seemed to the astonished Blackfoot that a hundred men faced them, so rapid were the discharges, and they hid back in alarm to the shelter of the rocks, from which they peeped out, and sent arrow after arrow into the darkness, at the place where they thought the foe was hiding. Not a word was heard, and the arrows rattled harmlessly against the rocks,



and fell broken to the stone floor. The chief was in a fury. It was a point of honor with him to capture these men, who had so deceived him, and he cared not what sacrifice he made to do the work. Leaving his men to watch the party by the river, he went back to search for another passage, by which he could get into the rear of the men who opposed him. Passing without number branches off from the main entrance, and in all he saw the broad arrows chalked upon the wall, but they pointed toward the main passage. He was about to give up in despair, when in turning a corner, he came suddenly upon a narrow passage in which the arrow pointed the other way. With the daring peculiar to his nature, he plunged in and passed his way through a world of beauty for a long distance, passing now and then to note the arrow on the wall. At length the path seemed to end in a small room hung with tapestry, like the room in which the giant forms were sitting.

He walked round and round the place, seeking for an outlet, and at length he found a set of natural steps, which led upward. He walked up and found the arrow chalked upon the wall pointing into a narrow opening barely large enough to admit the body of a man. Thrusting himself forward, he crept through this narrow passage, still holding the torch, and came out upon the "Giants' Couch," in the presence of those giant old figures. As he did so, the sound of many feet told him that his enemies were near, and he hurried back through the narrow passage, and putting his torch in a niche, came back to see who were coming. Peeping out from the hole in the wall, he saw the whole roof glow and flash as if set with emeralds and diamonds, and the trapper band came on, with Sash at their head, eight or ten of them carrying torches.

"Let the 'Spirit of the Hills' fear me," muttered the chief, "for she shall go into my wigwam and cook my venison."

He had his bow with him, and could not resist the temptation to do evil. Raising the bow, he fitted a shaft to the string, and sent the arrow through the shoulder of "Sloppy Jim," who uttered a howl of pain, for the weapon had struck him while the dog was on him, and waked him from one of his wilful sleeps. They heard the twang of the bow string and started, looking about them in wonder, but the



savage had drawn in his head, and was not to be seen. "Sleepy Joe" danced about in an agony of rage and pain, calling down the ban of wrath upon the head of the Indian who launched that arrow. It had been sent with such force that the head was driven completely through the shoulder, and all he had to do was to break it off and pull out the shaft, raging up and down the vaulted room while he did so. Blackbird kept quiet and they passed on, thinking the shaft had come from the front. The moment they had disappeared, he descended from his perch and followed them through the long rooms, keeping out of the circle of light. They crossed the dangerous bridge in safety, and were greeted when they appeared upon the bank of the river by a cloud of arrows, wounding several of the party slightly.

"Git kiver," shouted Buckskin Bill, "an' then lay low an' keep dark. We ain't goin' to be drew out'n our own house by no low-lived Injun truck that ever lived."

The scattered bowlers about the place furnished noble hiding-places, from which they could use their weapons with deadly effect if the Indians showed themselves upon the bank of the river. But, they had received orders from the chief to keep quiet until he returned, and the party remained *statu quo*, neither being able to inflict any great damage upon the other.

"Where is Garrett?" demanded Clinton Aubrey.

"Cuss him, he hez jined the durned Blackfeet, I reckon," said the guide. "I left him with the rest of the boys."

"Then where is he now?"

"Can't say," replied the Yankee. "He took a torch and said he guessed he'd go after you. That's the last I seen of him."

"Do not blame him too rashly," said Clinton. "Who can tell but the poor fellow has met his death in one of those dreadful chasms which yawn beside the path. I can not think that he is a traitor, or would do us any wrong."

"He don't look like it, I know," said Bill, "but, you kaint most always tell what you leasly expect now days. He may be a consarned renegade for all we know. Anyhow, he's posted about the Injun kentry."

"So are you."



"I ain't saying he's a traitor. I'd hate to believe that of him myself, 'cause I don't like to see a great strong-bodied white man turn traitor to his fellows. Maybe he got lost."

"That is easy enough, since Stella had not explained the symbols to him. That arrow was well meant. It just skimmed my ear, and took a piece out."

"It must rife the curses awful 'cause they kain't git at us. Sell, what did you do with my lantern?"

"It is in our room."

"I reckon you'd better go and git it, ha'n't you?"

Stella took a torch and hurried away. Passing through the long rooms, she at length reached the one where they made their home, and searched for the lantern. It was one which the guide had made in his idle moments, and was a copy of a hideous skeleton head, with grinning mouth and long fangs, a thing which, when lighted in a dark place, showed horribly in the sight of men not acquainted with its nature. He had made a peculiar little lamp which fitted into this strange lantern, and she lighted it, turning the slide so that the grinning tooth and nose were not revealed—nothing but the eyes. With this in her hand she turned back, and hurrying through the rooms, reached the Giants' Couch, when all at once a wild figure, torch in hand, bounded out to meet her. She knew the Indian at a glance, and started back in terror, while he stood there before her, a hatchet in one hand, a torch in the other, looking at her with burning eyes.

"Spirit of the Hills," he said, "where would you go?"

Stella knew the language of the Blackfeet, for in those long winters, when there was nothing else to do, it had been the delight of the guide to give her lessons in the Indian tongue, and she was an apt scholar.

"What is that to the chief?" she answered, promptly. "I go my own way; let him go his."

"The way of the Spirit of the Hills shall be the way of Blackfeet hereafter," said the chief. "She must go where he goes, and live in his wigwan, and he will bring meat to the lodge, while another shall keep the lodge-fire bright, and hoe the maize. I have spoken."

"Let me pass," cried Stella.



"The Spirit of the Hills is not a fool, and why should she think the Blackfoot on? No; you can only pass the way Blackbird shall point out, and dwell in his wigwam."

"I must pass," said Stella. "Stand aside, or I call upon the Spirit of the Rocks to come to my aid. Ye have named me Spirit of the Hills, and you do well. Let the chief beware, lest some great evil befall him."

Blackbird looked a little shaken, for he was superstitious, and thought much of the power of the Spirit of the Hills.

"Hush," he said, "Blackbird would not speak evil to the Spirit; but his heart is very tender toward her. Let her think how great a thing it is to come into a lodge where the chief is first counselor of the tribe. Two other wives sit in my wigwam, but you shall be first of all, and they shall be your slaves."

"I will not listen," replied Stella. "I am not of your blood or nation. Let me pass, I say. A great chief will not insult a woman who does not care for him."

"I have sworn," replied the chief, "and the word of a chief is sacred. You shall come into my lodge, and be my wife."

Quick as thought Stella made a blow at the torch, and dashed it from his hand. It fell into a pool of limestone water, and went out with a sharp hiss. She sprang back, and closed the slide of her lantern, so that he could not see her, and then stepped lightly to a niche in the wall, and then remained silent. For a moment the chief was startled, and then began to search for her, creeping his way stealthily along the wall of the cavern, in the darkness, tormented at the thought of losing her after all. Once Stella felt his hand groping at the entrance of the niche in which she was hidden, and placed her hand upon a small dagger which she carried in her belt, and half drew it from its sheath. But he passed on, while his hot breath touched her cheek. It was well for her that he did not touch her, for that moment would have been his last. He passed on, and she breathed more freely, and could hear his steps along the wall upon the opposite side of the cavern. Should she make a slip down and cross the bridge? He might hear her, and, directed by her step, seize upon her. She dared not attempt it, and remained quiet.



Again he approached her hiding-place, and she thought of a plan. Drawing back into the niche, she put out one hand, holding the lantern by its handle, which was at the back of the hood, and drew the slides all at once, revealing the fiery face in all its hideous deformity. Blackbird uttered a yell, and recoiled like a man who had seen a spirit, and turning on his heel, plunged into the canopy of the Giants' Couch. He struck his head against a heavy stone, in the darkness, and fell back bruised and bleeding. This was Stella's time. She stole out of her hiding-place, and was passing him, when a portion of her dress touched him. Instantly he seized upon it, but Stella sprang the hideous lantern in his very face. Again he fell back with a howl of fear, and slipping from his grasp, Stella darted across the bridge, leaving him in darkness.

The chief arose, stunned by the blow, and half wild with fear. He was alone in that dismal cave, his torch gone, and no guide out of the labyrinth into which he had penetrated. Yet he had no time to lose, and rising, he groped his way to the couch of the giant, hoping to find his way out in some way. He crept through the opening, and down the flight of stairs, and found himself in utter darkness, and knew that every step he took thenceforth must be in the midst of danger of the gravest kind. He blamed himself for attacking Stella when, if he had let her pass, he might have brought his men into the rear of the enemy and taken them by surprise. He sat down upon the last step and looked about him in dismay. While sitting there, a footstep sounded and a light began to glimmer in the distance. He stepped down from his perch and hid himself behind a broken column, waiting for the new-comer to appear. Perhaps it was one of his own men who had grown tired of waiting and had followed him. If an enemy, his life was sealed.

The footsteps came on, and he knew by the firm tread that it was a man who approached. A moment more, and he heard the sound of the feet more plainly, the light showed more upon the ceiling of the room, and a tall figure entered the room, a figure which shewed ghostly and white under the torch-light. The chief had seen that gigantic figure before and recognized it now. It was the White Demon!



To fit an arrow to his bow, and send it with all his force at the stout figure of the White Demon was his first thought. The shaft was well aimed, but it fell broken from the person of the strange being, as if it had been discharged against a wall of brass. At the twang of the bowstring, the giant figure turned toward the place from which the sound came, and with a terrified cry, the chief bounded up the stairs and crept into the narrow passage in time to escape a heavy blow from the Hudgeon which the White Demon carried in his hand. Baffled by the quick movement of the chief, the strange being darted after him, with an ability which was wonderful in so heavy a figure, and followed so close upon his track that the chief had just gained a footing upon the Giants' Couch when the head of his enemy showed through the opening. The chief struck at it with his hatchet, and the weapon was broken at the handle. Turning toward the opening of the main cavern, Blackbird darted in, followed by the White Demon. There was a wild cry, and the chief fell from the narrow bridge, and was seen no more. The White Demon paused, and held up his torch. Half a dozen rifles were leveled at him, but Buckskin Bill shouted to them to take care.

"The White Demon does no harm to white men," cried the giant. "Fear me not, and know that your worst foe has just gone to his account. Follow me not, nor attempt to stay me, but let me do my work as I will. But, be sure of this, the White Demon will be your friend."

## CHAPTER XI.

### STELLA'S PERIL.

WHILE they gazed, in mute bewilderment, not unmixed with alarm, the giant figure disappeared, gone they knew not whither. The rude borderers were pale, for there are no people upon earth more open to superstition, so credulous to untutored minds, than these forest men. They looked at one



another in confusion not unmingled with fear, but were recalled to themselves by a renewed attack on the part of the Indians, who were growing impatient at the continued absence of their chief. The attack brought back their native courage, and the crack of rifles illumined the darkness of the cave. Stella was standing behind a rocky bowlder, just behind the main body of the fugitives, encouraging them to fight bravely, when a sudden cry was raised by the Indians in front, and they rose as one man, fleeing in confusion and dismay. What had ceased their flight? Nothing more than the fact that Black-skin Ball had set up the lighted lantern upon a rock, with its flaming face turned toward the savage foe. A single glimpse of that distorted and hideous visage was enough for them, and they fled as if the demon was on their track. While Stella was laughing at their confusion, she felt a heavy hand pressed on her mouth, and she was borne back up on the rocky floor of the cavern, helpless in that strong clasp. Her back was toward the chasm or she would have seen in the dim light of the single torch, the maimed and distorted visage of Black-skin Ball rise from the cliff, and creep toward her with a catlike tread.

The fall had not been fatal to him, and he was reserved for another time. When he fell, he had struck upon a shelf ten feet below the verge of the chasm, and seizing upon a projecting stalactite, he had kept himself from falling farther, although badly bruised. Crawling up the rough sides of the pit, he had reached its top, and seeing Stella near at hand, he had seized upon her, determined to wreak upon her the vengeance he owed to the band of Aubrey. Tearing off the scarf she wore, he so muffled her face in it that in the confusion of the moment, amid the crack of rifles and the yells of wounded men, her feeble cries were not heard. Then, snatching her up in his arms, he darted across the narrow bridge and regained the other passage, dragging her after him. Once there, he put her on her feet, and commanded her to lead the way.

"How can I, in the darkness?" she said, quietly.

"Pshaw, Spirit of the Hills," replied the chief. "Do not make the cliff a fool because white men are so. You know the road through the cavern."

"And if I do, what then?"



"You will show it to the great chief Blackbird, who is to be your husband."

"I would sooner die. Help! help! The chief is carrying me away. Help! help!"

With a savage exclamation, which would have passed for an oath in English, the chief snuffed her hair in the scarf and darted away down the unknown path, while she, from the outside apprized him that the trappers had discovered the abduction of the girl, and were already on his track.

Buckskin Bill knew the secrets of the cave as well as Stella, and having lights, would speedily find him out. There was but one course open, and he quickly determined what to do. On the road to the open air was a passage leading into the next room so narrow that only one could pass through at a time, and here he determined to make a stand. The struggle grew loud behind him, and he knew that the pursuers were already in the passage, and he had not a moment to lose. Binding Stella's hands and feet tightly with the scarf and a belt, in spite of her struggles, he drew his knife and turned upon his pursuers like a hunted stag.

"Stay, dog of a white man," he shouted, shaking the glittering weapon in the air. "A child of the Blackfoot wants you."

The exclamation was directed at Buckskin Bill, who, with a revolver in one hand and a torch in the other, had appeared at the other end of the room. He raised his weapon, when Blackbird darted back and shouted to him to stop.

"A single step on this stone floor is a knife in the back of the Spirit of the Hills. Turn back, then, white man, and return to your place, unless you would kill your chief."

He had found a safeguard, then. Every one paused and looked from face to face. Who was there among them who dared advance, when they knew that the chief, reckless of his own life, would slay her rather than suffer her to fall to their hands? Each read the thoughts of the other in their flushed faces, and could not doubt that the Blackfoot chief had them in his power.

"Give her up," cried Aubrey, "and I will make you rich in the things you most covet. Blankets, rifles, powder and lead shall be yours, if you will let her go."



"Will you give me the little gun that shoots many times?" demanded the chief.

"Yes; both of them; all of them."

"Good. Will you give up your horses and blankets, and promise to come no more into the Blackfoot country?"

"Yes. You shall have every thing in our power to give. Let the girl go free, and for her dear sake I will give up this enterprise, which has been my thought for years."

"The young war-chief would do much for the love of the Spirit of the Hills," said the Indian, tauntingly. "Bah! he is a fool, or he would know that revenge is as sweet to the Blackfoot as to the white man, and that he would not give it up for all the blankets and powder in the great villages of the pretenses. The Spirit is mine; she shall go into my wigwam, cook my venison, and be the wife of a great chief."

"Look here, Blackbird," said Bill, "I've heard tell how't you've been heard to say that you'd rather hev me to burn than any man that treads the plains. All right, here I am. You let my little gal go free, and I'll go with you to the Blackfoot village, and be made a bonfire of, if you like. Come, you won't have an offer like that very soon, and I know it. Don't waste time foolin', but get to work at onc't. Say what you will do, and what you won't do, and be damed quick about it."

"Bah! Backskin Bill is a fool, though his head is getting gray. There are white men enough for the Blackfeet to burn, without you. Go; you are children, or you would not try to throw dust in the eyes of a great warrior. Am I a child, or am I Blackbird, the son of Rolling Thunder? I have said it, and the Spirit must go to my wigwam and be my squaw."

At this Stella called out to her father and entreated him, if he loved her, to save her, even by death, from the misery of a life in a Blackfoot lodge. But Backskin Bill could not do that.

"Blackbird," he said, in a stern voice, "how long do you expect I'd let you live if you carried off my child? I'd hev her hanged, if I had to follow you into the heart of a village to take her. Now, you'd better take those blankets and powder the young man offers you, and let her go."



"No; have I any fear of what a gray-head can do to me? Go back, and let a chief talk to his wife."

They drew off for a moment to consult, and the face of the old trapper showed the agony he endured.

"I've bin wrong, boys," he said. "I hadn't no right to bring that sweet young gal into this dangerous place. But it's done, and I'm afeard thar ain't no help far it, because he'll kill her ef we charge on him, just ez sure ez I live."

"Perhaps we can save her yet," said the young captain, eagerly. "I pledge you the aid of myself and my men to do the work. We will follow him even to his village, and destroy every thing before us, sooner than leave her in his hands."

"Ef I didn't love her so well, I'd take her at her word and charge at him, though he killed her the next minnit. Ain't thar no way to save her from him? Kain't we git a shot at him, somehow?"

"I don't see any chance," was the despondent reply.

"Then thar ain't but one way, and that is, to leave her in his hands and trust to luck to git her away. Oh—hold on. What do you say ef we go back to the other cave, leave a couple of three men hyar to see that he don't try to git her this way, make a charge on the red devils at the other end of the cave and drive 'em back long enough to let three or four of us dodge into the small cave."

"The only plan. Who will stay here and see that the chief does not escape this way?" said Aubrey.

Three of the trappers volunteered at once, and leaving them a torch, the remainder hurried back to the cave. The men were now wild for battle, and cheered lustily when it was announced that they were to be led against the enemy, and at once made hasty preparations.

The chief, hearing no more of his enemies, yet knew by the light of the torch that all of them had not gone. He remained quiet for some moments and then peeped cautiously out. Yankee Josh saw him and threw a stone at his head with such force and precision that, if he had not danced with extraordinary rapidity, he would never have troubled them a year. As it was, a corner of the stone pecked a portion of the scalp from one side of his head, inflicting a very painful wound, which drew a yell of rage from the chief, and caused him to



threaten direful calamities upon the head of the man who had dared to throw the stone at him.

The Yankee only answered by a laugh, and invited him to put out his head again, promising to throw better next time. But Blackbird did not care to test his skill any farther, and holding the nearly insensible body of Stella in his arms, he began to grope his way with stealthy steps down the passage, not wishing to let the watching scouts know of his departure. Their orders, however, were not to follow him, even if they had heard his departure. He knew that the path was full of danger, and that he must proceed slowly. Now and then he would lay his prisoner down upon the rocky floor, and go forward alone to find the best places at which to pass. Stella had by this time recovered from her first alarm, and her wits were at work. When he laid her down, she worked her hands vigorously to endeavor to free herself from her bonds, and succeeded so far that she could slip one hand readily from the scarf with which it was tied.

"I have heard that the Blackfeet were a brave tribe," she said, turning to him, "but a great brave does not insult the woman he loves by bonds. Why will not Blackbird let the Spirit of the Hills walk by his side and show him the way out of the cave?"

"The Spirit has the cunning of the fox," said the chief, "but the Blackfeet loves her better for that. It is just that the wife of so great a chief should be wise; but let her not think to throw dust in the eyes of a great brave. The Spirit would run away if her feet were free."

"The chief denies the first thing I ask him," said Stella, in well-imitated anger. "How can I believe that he love me when he will not let me walk?"

"Blackbird is strong. He can carry the woman he loves," replied the cunning chief, with a grim smile. "The man who loves a woman will do much for her."

Merrily wishing all kind of evil upon the head of this false friend, Stella permitted herself to be carried until he reached another dangerous place, and laid her down. Then she slipped her hand out of the scarf, and got out the small dagger which she carried in her belt, and cut the back skin belt which confined her feet. Then, hearing the chief return-



ing, she put the knife back in her belt and slipped her hand into the scarf again, just as he bent to lift her. She knew that a little further on she must be put down again, and with a patience worthy of the Indian, she waited for the time, keeping her feet in the same position she had held them when bound. Blackbird, in the darkness of the cave, could not see that any thing was wrong, and carried her forward until a new obstacle was in his way, when he put her down again and stole forward to search out the path. The moment he did so, she rose quickly, and knowing the place well, ran back several yards, and halted upon the other side of the dangerous place they had just passed, until the chief came groping back in search of her. She heard a low exclamation of surprise as he went over the place where he thought he had left her and could not find her. He walked in a circle and tried it again with the same result, until it began to dawn upon him that he was cheated.

"Spirit of the Hills," he cried, "where are you?"

Stella did not answer him, but had some difficulty in repressing an inclination to laugh, for he called her something like a man who is coaxing a canary back to its cage.

"Come, white girl. Do not take the time of the chief. I can not find you in the darkness, and it is time we were on the way."

Still silent. The chief began to get angry, and again ran about in a circle, trying to find her. It had not yet entered his head that she had succeeded entirely in freeing herself from her bonds, but that she had managed to roll herself out of reach, as he had done upon the occasion of his captivity in the camp of the voyagers.

"Child of the bad spirit," he screamed, "daughter of evil, where are you hidden?"

Still no reply, and the Indian fairly danced with anger, and continued his frantic search up and down the narrow place, putting his hand into cracks which would not have held a mouse, in the vain hope of finding the object of his search, who was seated quietly upon a stone a few paces distant, listening to the frantic appeals of the chief that she would answer him, and cease to take the valuable time of Blackbird, chief of the Blackfeet.



"Women of the bad heart," he shouted. "I will take your scalp when I find you?"

"Thank you," thought Stella. "But you'd better find me first."

She felt so confident of her power to elude him in the darkness, knowing the cave so thoroughly as she did, that she did not make the slightest effort to escape while he kept on the other side of the dangerous spot. She had determined, too, if he laid hands upon her again, to strike the dagger into his breast before he could shield himself. Stumbling about the narrow place, the chief felt something soft under his feet, and stooping, he picked up the scarf which had bound her hands, and comprehended in a moment that she was entirely free from her bonds. The yell of baffled malice to which he gave vent was too much for Stella's risibles, and she gave utterance to a merry laugh, upon which Blackbird made a rapid rush toward her, grasping at the place where he had heard the voice. He clasped only a cold stone pillar, for Stella had fled from the place.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A YANKEE TRICK.

THE chief stood a moment listening for her steps to guide him in the pursuit, but the moment she had placed a safe distance between them, she stopped again, and stood stock-still, looking about her for some way of escape. Being more accustomed to the dim outlines of the place than the savage, she knew her position exactly while he moved in utter darkness, groping about like a blind man, and cursing her in his heart.

At this moment the sound of a terrible combat and the cheering shout of the trappers told that they had begun the assault upon the Indians in the narrow pass. The chief knew that it was vain for him to stay longer to recapture Stella, for his presence was a tower of strength to his men, and without him they could do little.



"Wicked girl," he cried, "for this time you escape me, but not long. Blackbird, son of Rolling Thunder, will never give up the chase until you sit in his lodge. I have spoken."

He turned to go away, and had already taken a few steps in the direction of the battle, which now guided his way, when his body came in contact with that of some other person creeping cautiously up the pass. The next moment they were locked in a savage grapple, but Blackbird, although a man of giant strength, felt like a child in the arms which now enfolded him. Yet he put out all his strength, not in the hope of overcoming his adversary, but to wrestle himself out of his grasp and escape. Not a word had been spoken by the assailant, but Blackbird felt arms of steel about him, and hot breath upon his cheek. They fell to the floor together, and a rattling sound came from the man who had assailed the chief. The roar of combat had deepened and lights began to show in the cavern in which the main force was fighting, reflected from the stalactites of their own cavern. Stella could hear a deep, hurried breathing, and then a giant form sprang up alone, and the sound of a quick step was heard darting down the pass.

"Perdition!" cried a hoarse voice. "The villain has escaped me!"

"Who are you?" said Stella, approaching him in the darkness.

"Who speaks?" said the same deep voice. "Is it a voice of one long dead, coming to me in the darkness? Rest, unquiet spirit; rest! I have avenged you! I have seen your form at night ere now, a shadow in the pale beams of the moon, and that, too, had a voice which whispered to me. 'O,' it said, 'God do so to you, and more also, if you forget one jot or tittle of your sworn oath, until all be fulfilled!'"

"You are mistaken. I am no spirit, but an unfortunate girl who had fallen into the power of this chief."

"Your name?"

"Stella Ray."

"Ha! Then it is the daughter of the trapper who is known as Buckskin Bill. You have heard of me, and know me by the name my Indian foes have given me. I am the White Demon. What Indian is this who escaped me just now?"



"Blackbird."

"He? Did I not see him plunged into the black depths of the chasm yonder, not half an hour ago?"

"Yes. But God had not willed that the wretch should die so, but preserved him for another, perhaps for a worse fate. I can not tell. But how comes it that you know the secrets of this place, which we thought unknown to any except the friends of Backskin Bill, and those but few?"

"Child, there are few things in the Indian country which I have not seen. For years I have been a wanderer upon the green earth, going up and down for vengeance, my one solitary thought."

"It is written, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord,'" said Stella, solemnly.

"I learned that when a boy, but I am not willing to wait. Who has said that 'the mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind very fine.' They grind too slowly for me, and I can not, I will not wait. The Blackfeet have had reason to mourn the day they crossed my path, and there is not a village through all the broad expanse of country which they call their own, which has not felt the power of my arm. Enough; I hear voices, and they come this way. Doubtless your friends are coming to your aid. I will slip aside, and when they come say nothing of having seen me if you can help it. But remember, I am your friend."

Stella listened, and heard the sound of voices, among which she recognized that of her father. She stood silent in a niche, and soon a figure flitted by in silence, whose gigantic proportions could only belong to the White Demon, who, for some reason, did not wish to see her friends. A hurried rush of feet followed, and Backskin Bill, Clinton Aubrey, and two others of the band, rushed into the room.

"I thought that was the chief who rushed past us just now, Bill," said Aubrey. "Look you, old man. If he has killed that sweet girl of yours, there is my hand to follow the vile coward through his country to the very heart of his village and kill him, even at his lodge-door."

"Give us your hand. I'm with you, young man," said Bill. "You've got a heart, you hev. I hope no harm has come to my little gal."



"I hope not. Hold up your torch. There has been a struggle here, do you see?"

"Yes," said Bill, "I— Oh, gallory!"

He stopped short, for a pair of rounded arms were about his neck, and a pair of full red lips pressed to his. The old man was nearly frantic with delight, and Yankee Josh, who had come up when the sound of the battle began, danced a frantic horn pipe on the hard floor, accompanied by Irish Pat, while the hound howled an accompaniment. It was a moment of the wildest joy, and then Richard was himself again.

"Back to the cave," cried the captain, "and recall the men. Don't stop to ask questions now. Miss Stella, I hope you will believe me, when I say this is the happiest moment of my life."

"I heard you, sir. What did you mean by offering the chief every thing to let me go? You forgot something; you forgot that I am only a homeless, homeless wanderer, but—I am grateful, and so proud to think I have so many friends."

"You git out!" roared Josh. "How ar' ye goin' to help it; how ar' *they* goin' to help it? It's your fault ef we go crazy over you. Hurray! I'd like to jump over the moon, I'm so glad!"

"You are all very kind," said Stella. "Let us go."

Five minutes after they were in the cave again, and the leader of Aubrey recalled the men who were yet engaged in the struggle with the Indians, and who now retreated slowly, giving and taking as they went. Aubrey, Buckskin Bill and the others covered their retreat across the stream, and when they were safe upon the other side, they retreated across the dangerous bridge, and left the Indians at liberty to cross if they liked. For the first time they began to find that they were hungry.

"What time is it?" said Bill.

Aubrey took out his watch, and laughed as he did so.

"Upon my word I did not think it possible. What time do you think it is, Bill?"

"'Bout noon, I guess."

"It is nearly seven o'clock at night. We will starve them upon them yet, but there is no hurry about it. What have you got to eat?"



"There is plenty of jaded venison," said Bill. "And there's a lot of pemmican in bags in that room. We ain't got time to cook any thing."

"It won't take many to guard the pass now," said Aubrey. "Swinton, Pat, Josh and Garroway will do. The next post will be the Sun Chamber passage. I will set three men there. If you are hard pressed on the first post, my beds, retreat quietly to the second, firing off a pistol to let the boys know you are coming. As soon as some of the boys get supper, I will send them to relieve you, and I know you are hungry."

"I like to starve any minnit, capt'n," said Josh, in a lugubrious tone.

"I hope not, Josh. Well, keep cool if the enemy come at you, and don't get flurried whatever you do. One pistol each in the Indians cross the river, and I then retreat to the next post. I expect you to make a good stand there."

"Well go it, capt'n, never fear," said Josh, cheerfully. "Only I don't like the idee of you fellows eatin' away up there, and leavin' us out here to starve. Oh, git cold; the longer you stay the less I like it."

"You are a growler, Josh," said the captain, laughing. "I think you better look sharp for that opening above the bed there, for they might slip in on you unawares. The Blackfeet are tricky. Come, Miss Stella; you had better let me help you over these rough stones. Why, your arm is bleeding."

She looked at it in some surprise, and saw that it was bleeding, and she had not noticed it. In her struggle with the savage the wound had reopened, and the blood had stained her beautiful dress. Aubrey gritted his teeth and looked wicked.

"Let me dress it again, Miss Stella! It will go hard with Buckskin when I see him again."

He dressed the wound quickly but neatly, while Buckskin Blackfeet exclaims "not dead, but deep" against the Indian who had caused their dear blood to flow. It did not take long to dress the wound, and then they hurried back to the room in which Stella had lived so long. A fire was soon kindled in a sort of natural fireplace cut in the wall, and the men who were chilled by the deep atmosphere of the cave, warmed themselves at the cheerful blaze, while Stella directed them where to find something to eat, and the men, who were



very hungry, fell to work upon jerked venison, buffalopemmican, seasoned with the best sauce in the world, excellent appetites. Aubrey was about to send a relief to the patient guards outside, when the crack of a pistol announced that they were assaulted. The chief, escaping, had joined the force outside, and was not in a mood to wait long. He was frantic with rage at the manner in which he had twice lost possession of Stella, and was determined to have her, cost what it might. His savage followers were not very hot in the service, for they had lost some men, and safe thieving suited them far better than service in which they risked life and limb.

Yankee Josh, as soon as they commenced to cross the stream, fired the pistol as directed, and at once retreated to the next post, and the seven men guarded the narrow entrance to the Star Chamber. The moment the Indians appeared, they received a volley which sent them howling to cover, and there was a pause, in the midst of which the guards were reinforced by the arrival of ten men, headed by Aubrey and Buckskin Bill.

"I'm e'en a'most starved to death, capt'in," said Josh, "and if ye could keep 'em off while I git a bite of suthin' ter eat, I'd die happy. S'pose yer could, eh?"

"We'll try," said Aubrey, with a grim smile. "You have obeyed orders well, and now go back to the room, where you will find plenty to eat waiting for you."

"Ain't sorry to hear it," said Josh. "Come on, boys."

Leaving their comrades to attend to the Indians, the guards hurried back to get something to eat. They had been gone some moments, when a happy thought struck Aubrey, as he saw the scattered fragments of rock about the place.

"It seems to me, Bill, that by a little labor we could so block up that passage as to make it impracticable for our friends the Blackfeet to pass through. What do you say?"

"Never thought of it, by Jinks," said Bill. "Do it? Of course we kin."

They set to work with a will. First they rolled great blocks of limestone into the passage as far as they could go with safety, and then lifted smaller blocks upon them until they were wedged up to the very roof. Hundreds of these blocks



were scattered about in various directions, enough to have built a wall twenty feet high. The Indians were some time finding out what the white men were doing, and when they did understand it, frantic cries announced their thorough appreciation of the ruse which was being practiced, and their desire to stop it if possible.

But by this time the work had progressed so far that the white men could work with perfect safety, and those who understood the Indian language drove them nearly frantic by their taunts and laughter. Higher and higher the wall of separation was piled, and even after the passage was completely choked up, they piled one stone upon another until it would have been the work of a week to break through from the other side, and they felt safe. Then they left the Indians to dance and fume upon the other side of the wall, and came back to the other region, where every one laughed at the queer way they had chosen to guard themselves from attack.

"There is only one thing which puzzles me," said Aubrey. "Either the man who called himself Garrett is a traitor, or he is dead. If he had been lost in the cavern, the sound of the falling must have brought him to the place where we were."

"I am afraid he is dead," said Stella. "I pity him. What shall we do now?"

"For the present, rest. We need not hurry away. If we only knew the fate of Garrett I should be satisfied. Your beloved home will be useless to you now, Bill."

"Yes," said Bill, slowly; "but I'm gittin' sick of it, and I'll tell you why. Blood has bin shed here, and it won't be a lucky place for sech ez Stell to live in any more. Said you was going to Oregon, didn't you?"

"Yes; we mean to do our part to build up that great country and develop its resources. I will give my life to the work, and I doubt not I shall succeed. At least, I will give it a trial, and Oregon is my home from this hour. I will rise with a strong young State, and in the after days men will point to me in my old age as one who was of service to them in another generation."

"I will go with you, cap'n," said Bill. "You see I couldn't bring myself to live in a kentry even like Kansas. It's too



chess and confined far a man like me, and I kain't breathe free thar. Bat Oregon's another thing, you understand, and I could take to the plains when I tired of the village. And that ain't all: Still would be safe thar, and have advantages she couldn't git in this wild life."

"I shall be glad to have you with me," said the young captain. "Hark to our friends the Blackfeet: I wonder how they like the wall of separation?"

"Not at all," said a quiet voice.

They looked behind them with a start, for the voice was a strange one, and there, standing just in the rear of the party, was the strange being known as the White Demon. Then they saw for the first time what it was which had given him so odd an appearance. He wore a suit of chain armor, of ancient make, which fitted his body everywhere, and which was white as snow. The visor was down, and they could not see his face.

"You know me," he cried, "and I will not lead you astray. Come with me, and I will show you the only way to rid yourselves of the Blackfoot band."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### DEATH OF THE WHITE DEMON.

BECOMING accustomed to the visitations of this strange being, the trappers had ceased to fear him, although they still looked upon him with wonder. They had seen enough of him to know that he was no friend to the Indians and would do all in his power to harm them. When, therefore, he offered to lead them from the cave and show them a way by which they could cut off the savages from the pursuit, they determined to trust him.

"Lead on," said the young captain. "We will follow you, because we believe you will not lead us into danger, and that you hate the Indians, if possible, worse than we do."

The giant bowed his head and led the way back to the outer cave in which the horses were chained. Each man



looked to his horse and prepared him for the march, while the White Demon stood looking on, without speaking. When all were ready, he approached them.

"You have lost a man who was in your company this morning, for I saw him when you were in the upper pass. Where is he?"

"You mean a stranger who joined us as we came up from our last camp. Yes, he left us after we entered the cave, and we fear he is dead."

"I fear so too. This is his horse, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Then I had better take it, and if he reappears he may have it again. Is this his rifle?"

"Yes."

"Then I am armed with a dead man's weapons," said the stranger, in a mournful voice. "Yes, it is better for me to be so armed, for I am as much dead to the world as if I were rotting in my coffin, and I have to thank the Blackfoot for it. Come."

He led the gray horse, an animal of wonderful length of limb, out of the cave, and in a moment the whole band were in the saddle and moving in silence up a narrow path which led up the mountain pass. Imitating the example of the giant, they let the horses feel their way in the gathering darkness, trusting to their instinct to make their footing sure. For half an hour the party continued the ascent, when the moon rose slowly in the clear sky and they could make their way more readily. All at once their ears were greeted by the sound of many horses stamping, neighing, and biting at each other as mustangs will when in a corral, and they knew that they must be approaching the place in which the Indians had left their horses. The White Demon passed, held his hand for silence, and then beckoned the captain to ride close to him:

"Pick out ten men besides yourself for a dash. It must be quickly done or not at all. If we can get possession of these horses and take them with us, the Indians must return to their village for more, and it will go hard if you can not make your camp in the country of the Crows before they can do that. The Crows will do you no harm, for



James Beckworth is a chief among them, and if he has his vices, at least he will not see harm done to white men by his tribe."

"Your plan is good," said the captain, in the same cautious whisper. "I will act upon it."

Pointing out the men he wished to use, they rode out from the rest, preparing their weapons as they did so. The men chosen were all hardy trappers, trained in the devices of the savages. They were made to understand what was required of them without useless talk, and when all was ready, they dismounted, and stole forward on foot. Blackbird had left a horse-guard of ten picked warriors, men who understood their business, but who did not dream of an assault from the direction in which it was coming. Crawling like snakes along the ground, the party reached a place from which they could look into the corral. It was an opening surrounding the Devil's Bowl, perhaps two or three acres in extent, covered with a growth of short green grass, upon which the horses were feeding, secured by the long rawhide halts which left them considerable freedom of action. The trampling of so many feet and the vicious sneaking of some of the ill-tempered brutes aided the assailants in approaching the camp unperceived. A hundred horses guarded by ten men, who were just now intently engaged in listening to the sounds coming up from beneath, which told that their comrades had given up the futile attempt to break through the barrier which had been set up against them.

The White Demon gave the signal by raising his hand, and the next moment the horse-guard was assailed by the appearance of twelve strong men armed to the teeth, plunging down upon them. Foremost among these, advancing with mighty strides, they saw the man or demon they most dreaded, the White Demon, whirling over his head a rifle, which he held as a father in his grasp. The sight was too much for their nerves to bear, and with yells of fear they hunched themselves at the sides of the Devil's Bowl, and heedless of the danger to life and limb, plunged recklessly downward. Only one man, a stout warrior who wore a necklace of bears' claws, which no one has a right to wear unless he has slain the "grizzly" in fair fight, stopped a moment on the brink, poised his heavy spear,



sharpened like a razor. The White Demon rushed at him, and the Indian struck him full in the breast, and they saw blood upon the bosom of the white armor. The giant uttered an unearthly cry, and snapping off the spear like a reed, he struck the Indian in the face with his clenched hand, and hurled him down the side of the "Devil's Bowl." They saw his body describe a parabolic curve in the air, and then hover for a moment and strike the earth at the bottom. The corral was now in the wildest confusion, the cries of the Indians below mingling with the neighing of the mustangs, and the shouts of the assailing party. Answering the bugle of Aubrey, the white band rushed forward, and helped to secure the trampling beasts. Before the band of Blackbird could emerge from the intricate windings of the cavern in which they were entangled, every mustang was secured in such a way that he could not escape, and driven down the mountain path a little way, two abreast, for not more than that number could pass at once. At the same time the band of Blackbird began to struggle out of the depths of the cavern, and were greeted by a rattling volley which drove them to seek shelter in the cave again. Hemmed into the narrow circumference of the bowl, whose sides could only be ascended upon that portion upon which the trappers stood guard, the Indians were entirely at a disadvantage, and they saw it. Skulking into the cave, they sat down, while Blackbird shouted to Aubrey for permission to come out and treat.

"You may come," said Aubrey, "and we promise that you shall not be harmed."

Blackbird came climbing up the rugged sides of the bowl, his savage face showing the agony he suffered at being outwitted by the white men whom he held in such utter contempt.

"The devil who has misled you so long has left you, it seems," said Aubrey. "What have you got to say?"

"Our white brothers must not be too hard upon their brothers the Blackfeet," was the reply. "Blackbird is sorry he has done wrong to his brothers, but he was deceived. He thought they were children, but he knows now that they are brave men as brave even as the Blackfeet. We have decided to let our brothers go in peace if they will give us the rifles, the powder and balls, and the blankets they promised."



"The devil! Is there any other little thing you would like to ask?"

"Nothing more," replied Blackbird, with refreshing candour.

"I suppose you could not do any better by us?" said Aubrey.

"Our brothers will not offer us less than they promised?"

"I have a mind to tie you up and give you a sound whipping which will teach you to be less impatient," said Aubrey, exasperated at the demand. "You are in our power, and we in yours. It would serve you right if we swept you from the face of the earth. These are our terms. You shall order ten of your braves to bring up all the bows, arrows, hatchets and spears in your band, and we will destroy them before you. Being weaponless, it will be out of your power to do us an injury."

"The white man does not mean that?" said the Blackfoot, in dismay.

"We mean that, and nothing else," said the other. "Get about it at once."

The Indian went to the verge of the bowl, and called out the order in the Indian tongue, merely making the mistake of ordering *all* his men to come up with the arms.

"That won't do," said Bill. "The cap'n said *ten* men; if any more offer to come out they are devil men."

With a look of baffled rage and disappointment, the chief changed his order, and ten disconsolate braves appeared, each bearing in his arms a bundle of weapons, which Buckskin Bill and some of the rest sorted out and counted. After a short halt had been brought up the savages signified that they had brought all.

"It won't do," repeated Buckskin Bill. "That's plenty more whar these come from. Bring 'em up."

During the coming of the old warriors, the Indians were set to work, until all the weapons were lying upon the rocks.

"You may go back to your cave," said Aubrey, "and when you hear the bugle, you can come up. If you come before, woe upon your heads."

Blackbird paused a moment upon the brink, and cast a look of malignant hate at the party.

"You have conquered," he said. "But remember this:



Blackbird, son of Rolling Thunder, will never forget nor forgive, and he is almost happy, because he sees blood upon the breast of the White Demon."

With these words he disappeared, and they saw him no more. All, in the hurry of the moment, had forgotten the man who had aided them in their extremity, and turning to look at him when the chief spoke, Aubrey saw him leaning against a tree, his visor up, and a face of ashy paleness. Aubrey and Blackskin Bill ran to kill him, calling to the rest to watch the Blackfeet, but as they approached him his giant form trembled and sank to the earth like a fallen tower.

"Undo the armor," he whispered. "I am going home."

They hastily unstrapped the mail, took off the helmet, and bared his noble face and breast, when all saw to their utter surprise that *Gazette* was the White Demon. The spear of the savage had penetrated a weak spot in the mail, and the broken head still protruded from his breast. Aubrey laid his hand upon it, and would have drawn it out, but the White Demon stopped him.

"A moment," he said. "I have not long to stay, and when you draw the spear from my bosom I am gone. Call the trapper, Blackskin Bill. I wish to speak to him."

"Here I am," said Bill. "What is it?"

"Who is the girl you call your daughter; is she really your child?"

"No. I found her on the prairie, sixteen years ago," replied Bill.

"Tell me about it, and be quick for I am going fast."

Blackskin Bill hastily recapitulated the story he had told in the trappers' camp while the White Demon lay silent.

"Enough," he said. "I am satisfied. Child, come to me and hear what I have to say. I am that unfortunate man, whose wife was slain upon the prairie while upon a hunt, bringing the possession of the plains to the fort in the Crow country."

"Since that time I have ranged the hills, thinking of nothing, caring for nothing, but to take vengeance upon her slayers. I have done my work, and am satisfied. Ah!"

Sam threw herself, weeping, by the dying form of her father with his hand clasped in hers.



"Your name is Stella Ray, indeed. How did you find that, Buckskin Bill?"

"It was on a letter I picked up by the way a next day, and a man read it to me. That's how I knew to name her Stella."

"You have done nobly by my child. These hills have been my home as well as yours; I know you lived in the cave, and I made my home in this end. Often I have been forced to hide when you passed through. The armor I wore was an heir-loom of the family, and I put it on that day, when I left camp, in sport, and I have found it of inestimable value since. It failed me at last, but not until I had done my work. Young man, I have seen in your eyes that you love my daughter. Is it not so?"

"I hope to win her love some day," said Aubrey, in a low voice.

"I believe you will be true to her, and I think she loves you. The Indians whom you have found dead upon the trail without a mark of violence, perished by my hand, no matter how. Never separate Stella from the true man who has been a faithful father to her all these years. Take my armor, after I am gone, and preserve it as a memento of the man who loved her mother well. Good-by, all; I go to my wife."

He drew the spear-head from his breast as he spoke, a gush of blood followed, and in a moment the White Demon was no more. They found upon his body a manuscript which told his name and the story of his life. Philip Ray was a scion of a family in England, which dated its history before the conquest. Aubrey lifted the half-fainting girl, while some of the men covered the body with a blanket and fixed it to a horse. They rode all night, and at early morning made her a grave upon a sunny slope, and that poor frail heart was at rest.

Clinton Aubrey knew by symbols on his breast that he was a "Mason," and read the beautiful service of that secret order over his remains. As the rest of the band rode on, Clinton and Stella paused a moment beside the grave.

"You heard what he said, Stella," said the young man, gravely. "My fate is in your hands. Shall I be your guide through life?"



She gave him both hands quickly, and he pressed his lips to them; then they rode on after the others, toward the distant West, to make the name of Aubrey a household word in their beautiful Western home.

THE END.



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